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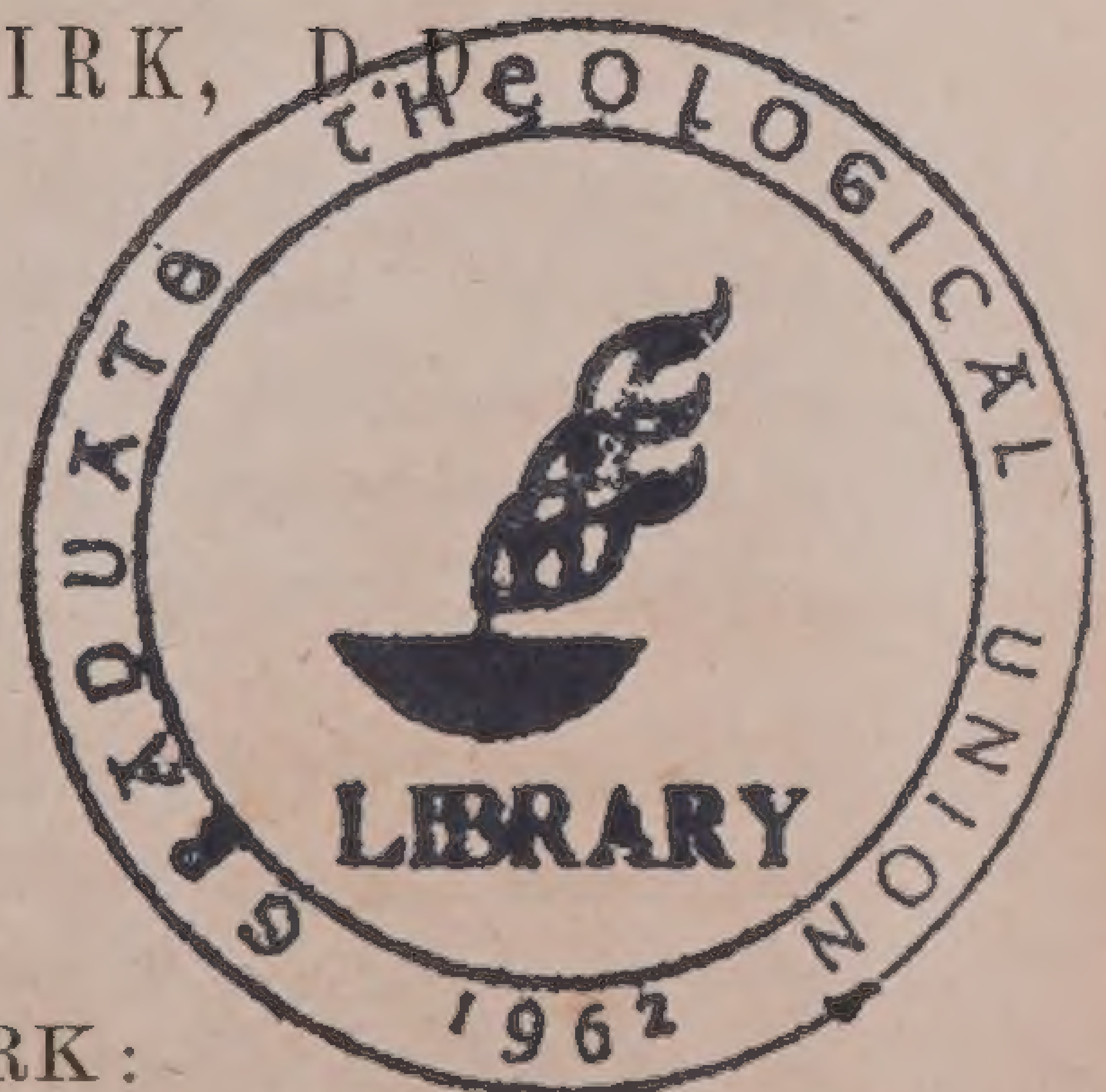
# LECTURES

ON

## THE PARABLES OF OUR SAVIOUR.

BY

EDWARD N. KIRK, D.D.



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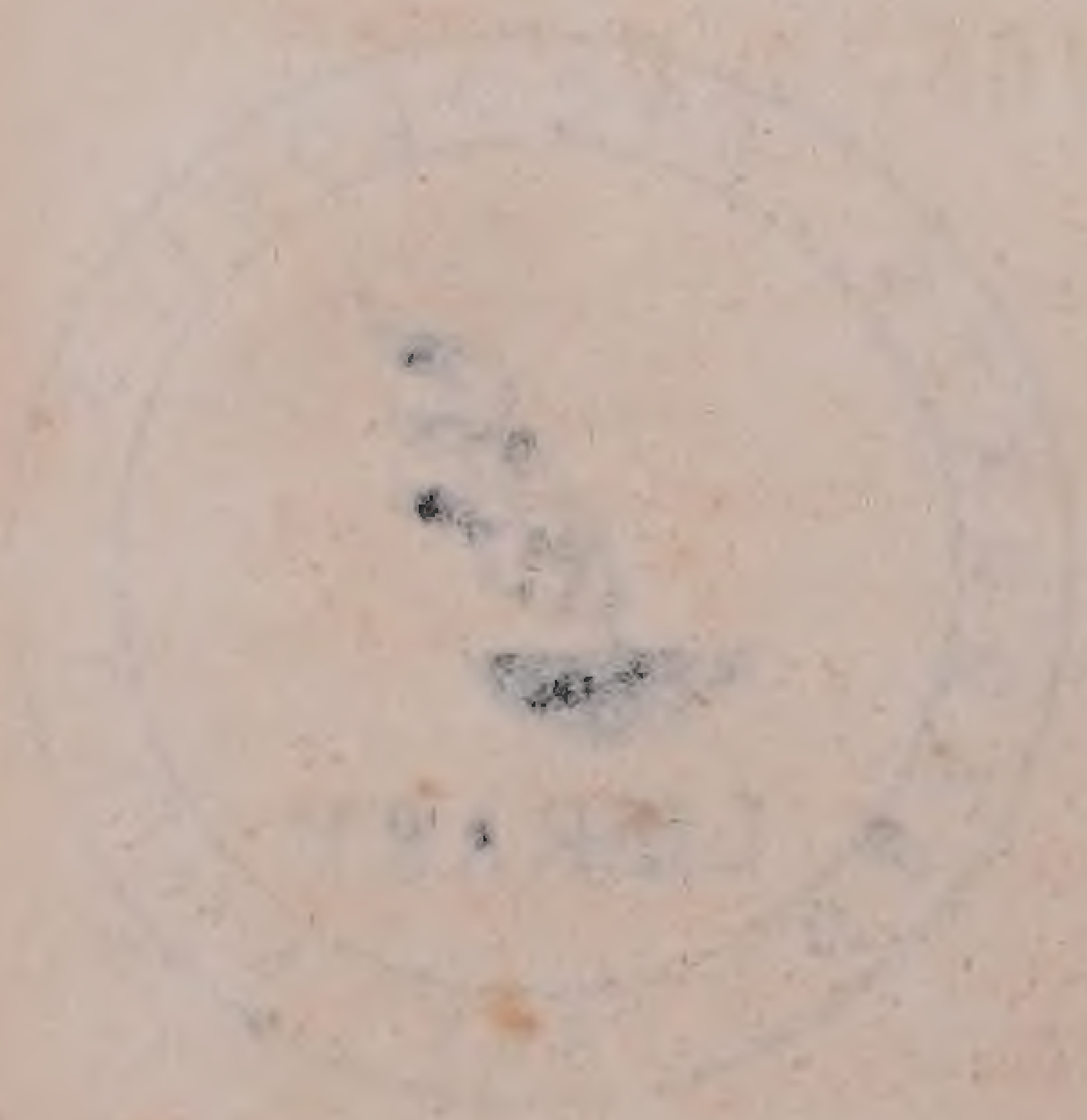
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## P R E F A C E .

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THE parables spoken by our Lord have always, and deservedly, attracted a peculiar share of attention. All the utterances of him, who spake as never man spake, are wonderful. But the pious readers of the Scriptures have ever felt a peculiar charm in these simple unfoldings of the sublimest truths.

Scientific men have labored to define the parables; but have generally failed, by aiming too high. The popular notion of a parable is, that it is a fictitious narrative, illustrating a religious principle, like that of the Prodigal Son. And yet all persons have admitted among the parables many statements or comparisons, which in no degree partake of the narrative form.

The word *Parable* is employed in nearly fifty places in the New Testament, and in various specific senses. Its generic notion is simply that of comparison, or similitude. The English translators have rendered it by "comparison" (as in Mark iv., 30); "figure" (Heb. ix., 9); "proverb" (Luke iv., 23); and "parable."

Regarding the parables then as strictly mere figures, more or less expanded, and more or less explained; about one hundred of them occur in the discourses of our Lord; to only twenty-two of which is the name of parable applied by the sacred writers.

Viewed in this light, it is very interesting to contemplate them, first, as groups of natural objects; then, as emblems of



spiritual truths. Thus brought together, they suggest many impressive and valuable reflections; preëminently exhibiting the simplicity and grandeur of the Saviour's teaching. Viewed on their natural side, they are like that toy of our childhood, the kite, which the philosopher employed for the grave purposes of science. Viewed on their spiritual side, they resemble the electric light and power of the heavens, which Franklin brought gently to the earth by that kite.

These figures are chosen partly from agricultural or pastoral life: as the sower, the tares, the mustard-seed, wolves in sheepskins, sheep among wolves, the harvest, the yoke, the laborers hired, the ploughman, &c.; partly from domestic objects, scenes, interests and employments: the leaven, the salt, the wedding, &c.; from the ordinary feelings of men concerning property; from their feelings toward the unfaithful; from the common estimate of kindness; and from the feelings of men concerning responsibility, prudence, ostentation, and erring children; from fishing; from nature's familiar objects; from history; from ordinary occupations; from Jewish society and its customs; from popular belief, and popular maxims.

It is then obvious that the range of subjects embraced in these parables makes them at once supremely important and directly practical; and, if the course of Lectures here presented had aimed to be scientific rather than popular, it should have embraced a discussion, more or less extended, of every subject figuratively presented by our Saviour. It might then, however, be difficult to render a sufficient reason for presenting in one work that class of subjects, rather than those which he uttered in a literal form; and this course of illustrations being necessarily limited, the author was guided in his selection from the whole group solely by the peculiar interest which, from the time they fell from those sacred lips, has invested this portion of these beautiful and impressive exhibitions of religious truth.



The classification of them here made is not the only one for which substantial reasons might be given; but it claims to be just, so far as it goes.

As it may assist some student of the sacred oracles to have a list of the subjects which the great Teacher has chosen to represent in figurative forms, they are here presented under an arrangement more or less complete; but which, it is believed, will be found by many to be very interesting and impressive.

DOCTRINES.	FIGURES.	TEXTS.
The Gospel sent from God to save man,	The Sower, . . .	Matt. xiii. 3.
Vindication of God's mercy	Lost Silver and Sheep, .	Luke xv. 1.
Christ, a sufferer, . . .	Jonah; Broken bread, .	Matt. xii. 39; Luke xxii. 19.
“ life and support of the Church,	Woman in travail, . . .	John xvi. 21. John xii. 24.
“ Saviour, . . .	Grain in ground, . . .	Matt. xvi. 18;
	Rock; Vine, . . .	John xv. 1.
	Temple; Water; Bread,	John ii. 19, iv. 14, vi. 35.
	Door; Shepherd; Light,	John x. 7, xiii.
	Physician; Serpent of brass,	Matt. ix.; John iii.
“ in heaven, . . .	The Resurrection and Life,	John xi. 25.
	New wine; Providing mansions,	Matt. xxvi.; John xiv.
The Church, a blessing, .	Light of world; Salt, .	Matt. v.
“ “ imperfect, .	Tares, . . .	Matt. xiii.
“ “ transferred,	Unfaithful steward,	Matt. xxi.
“ “ will become universal.	Mustard seed, . . .	Matt. xiii.
Satan dispossessed, . . .	Strong man armed, . . .	Matt. xii.
Man a sinner, . . .	The Sick, . . .	Matt. ix.
The Gospel rejected by impenitence, unbelief, compromise, and superficial faith,	The Two Sons, . . .	Matt. xxi.
	Two Masters, . . .	Matt. vi.
	Seed on bad ground, . . .	Matt. xiii.
	The Ploughman, . . .	Luke ix.
Convictions lost, . . .	The Unclean Spirit, . . .	Matt. xii.
Invitations rejected, . . .	The Great Supper, . . .	Luke xiv.
Hypocrisy, Ostentation, .	Sounding the trumpet, .	Matt. vi.
“ Censoriousness,	Mote and Beam; Gnat	Matt. vii., xxiii.
“ Scrupulousness,	and Camel; Cup and Platter,	



DOCTRINES.	FIGURES.	TEXTS.
Hypocrisy, False and injurious pretensions,	Whited Tomb; Covered Grave,	Matt. xxiii
False teachers, . . .	Wolves in sheepskins; Blind leaders,	Matt. vii., xv.
Receiving the Gospel, . .	Seed in good ground, . .	Matt. xiii.
“ great and difficult change.	New birth; Strait gate,	John iii., Luke xiii.
“ forethought exercised,	Laying up treasures; Builders,	Matt. vi., vii
“ “	Housekeeper forewarned.	Luke xii.
“ “	King going to war, &c.; Unjust Steward,	Luke xiv., xvi.
“ prizing the salvation of God,	The hidden treasure; the Pearl,	Matt. xiii.
“ returning home	The Lost Son, . . .	Luke xv.
“ relations of believer to Christ	The family of Christ, . .	Matt. xii.
“ the service of Christ easy,	The Yoke, . . .	Matt. xi.
“ piety progressive,	The Leaven; Growing plant,	Matt. xiii., Mark iv.
Branches of piety:		
humility, . . .	The Hired Laborers, . .	Luke xvii.
“ “	The Humble Guest; Pharisee and Publican,	Luke xiv., xviii.
love, self-denial, . . .	Two Debtors; Offending Hand,	Luke vii., Matt. vi
forgiveness, simplicity,	Relentless Servant; the Sound Eye,	Matt. xviii., vi.
kindness, . . .	Good Samaritan; Benevolent Host,	Luke x., xiv.
trust in Providence, . .	Birds and Lilies, . . .	Matt. vi.
prayer importunate, . .	The Friend; the Importunate Widow,	Luke xi., xviii.
prudence and good sense,	The Pearls; New Cloth and Wine,	Matt. vii., ix.
“ “ “	The Children of the Bride-chamber,	“ “
Confessors and martyrs, .	Sheep among Wolves; the Husbandman,	Matt. ix., xxii.
True ministers wanted, .	Instructed Scribe; Harvest,	Matt. x., xiii.
Principles of action, . .	The Tree recognized, . .	Luke vi.
Actions betray character,	Good and Bad Tree, . .	Matt. vii.
Signs of the times, . . .	The Tree; the Lightning,	Matt. xxiv.
World unreasonable, . .	Children in Market-place,	Matt. xi.



DOCTRINES.	FIGURES.	TEXTS.
Death ends probation, .	Dives and Lazarus; Rich Fool,	Luke xvi., xii.
Judgment, certainty, .	Axe at root; Deluge, .	Matt. iii., xxiv.
“ “ .	Servant rioting, .	Matt. xxiv.
“ day of discrimination, .	Drag-net; Sheep and Goats,	Matt. xiii., xxv.
“ “ .	The Fan; Wedding Garment,	Matt. iii., xxii.
“ “ .	The Ten Virgins, .	Matt. xxv.
“ dreadful account .	The Barren Figtree, .	Luke xiii.
“ “ “ .	The Buried Talent, .	Matt. xxv.
Retribution; or rewards proportioned to merit,	The Absent King, .	Luke xix.

Probably the majority of those who read these pages, would prefer the practical discussion of these religious topics to a critical or formal statement of the meaning of words in the texts on which the subjects are found. As, however, much diversity of opinion exists about the extent to which the resemblance holds in each parable between the natural and the spiritual, it may gratify some to know the views of one who has made them a study. To meet this desire, a table is here drawn out, which expresses the author's opinions of the degree of resemblance there is between the details of each symbol and the subject it symbolizes, and at what point in each case the resemblance ceases.

So far as the following explanation is just, it shows the principles on which the parables are constructed to be these:

1. Natural objects and the events of history contain the types of spiritual things;

2. The resemblance between them is more or less limited in every case;

3. Sometimes natural objects and human character illustrate divine things indirectly, inversely, or by contrast.

To apply these principles to the interpretation of each



parable furnishes a severe but profitable occupation to the human mind, and leaves room for differences of opinion among interpreters.

## II. TABLE.

*Table of the Parables here discussed; showing the significancy of their details.*

THE PARABLE.	LECTURE.	TYPE.	ANTITYPE.
THE SOWER, Matt. xiii. 3-8, and 18-23.	III., XIV., XV., XVI., XIX.	The sower, . . . The field, . . . The parts of it, . . . The seed, . . . The fruit, . . .	Christ. The world. The hearts of men. The gospel. Holiness or obedience.
THE LOST SHEEP and THE LOST SILVER, Luke xv. 1-10.	III. . .	Sheep and silver, Shepherd and woman, Going (v. 4) and sweep- ing (v. 8).	Soul of man in sin. God. System of grace.
THE VINE, . . . John xv. 1-8.	IV. . .	Calling neighbors, . . . The vine, . . . The husbandman, . . . The branches, . . . Fruit bearing branches, Unfruitful branches, . . .	All good beings rejoicing Christ. The Father. Professed disciples. True believers. False professors
THE LEAVEN, . . . Matt. xiii. 33.	V. . .	The meal, . . . The woman, . . . The leaven, . . .	The heart. The Holy Spirit. His influences.
GROWING SEED, . . . Mark iv. 26-29.	VI. . .	The seed, . . . The husbandman, . . .	Religious principles. (Not symbolic; or, but partially.)
THE DEBTORS, . . . Luke vii. 41-50.	VII. . .	The harvest, . . . The creditor, . . . The servants most in- debted.	Death. Christ. Those who have the deepest sense of their guilt.
THE LABORERS, . . . Matt. xx. 1-16.	VIII. . .	The least indebted, . . . The householder, . . . The laborers, . . . Day, . . . Different hours of the day.	Those who have light estimate of their guilt. Christ. Believers. Life-time.
THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN. Luke xviii. 9-14.	IX. . .	Evening, . . . Murmuring, . . .	Those differences in the religious lives of men which tempt some to pride. Death, or peculiar times of discovering the free- ness of grace.
THE WIDOW, . . . Luke xviii. 1-8.	X. . .	The widow, . . . The judge, . . .	Pride and jealousy work- ing in true believers.
THE GOOD SAMARI- TAN. Luke x. 25-37.	XI. . .	The Pharisee, . . . The Publican, . . . The traveller, . . . The thieves, . . . Priest and Levite, Samaritan, . . .	Self-righteous men. Humble men. Praying persons. (Anti-symbolical.) Man. The trials of life. Selfish formalists. The true disciples.



THE PARABLE.	LECTURE.	TYPE.	ANTITYPE.
THE RELENTLESS SERVANT, Matt. xviii. 21-35.	XII. . .	<p>The king, . . . .</p> <p>The servants, . . . .</p> <p>The reckoning, . . . .</p> <p>Servant largely indebted</p> <p>Inability to pay, . . . .</p> <p>The command to be sold,</p> <p>The entreaty, . . . .</p> <p>The free remission of the debt,</p> <p>The second servant, . . . .</p> <p>The violent demand, . . . .</p> <p>The suppliant, . . . .</p> <p>The refusal, . . . .</p> <p>The report to the king,</p> <p>The king's reply, . . . .</p>	<p>God.</p> <p>Men.</p> <p>Daily awakening of conscience.</p> <p>All men viewed as having offended God.</p> <p>No man can pay debt of past sins.</p> <p>God's justice executed or threatened.</p> <p>Prayer for forgiveness.</p> <p>Forgiveness is free.</p> <p>Man as injuring man.</p> <p>Revenge.</p> <p>Man confessing his wrong to his fellow-man.</p> <p>Pride and revenge.</p> <p>God's knowledge of our actions.</p> <p>God's treatment of revenge.</p>
THE UNFAITHFUL STEWARD, Luke xvi. 1-13.	XIII. . .	<p>The rich man; the steward; the accusation; the wasting; the reckoning and the sentence; the soliloquy,</p> <p>The course taken, vs. 5, 6 and 7,</p> <p>The commendation, v. 8,</p> <p>The first inference, v. 8,</p> <p>The application, v. 9, . .</p> <p>The second inference, v. 10,</p> <p>The third and fourth inferences, vs. 11 &amp; 12,</p> <p>The fifth inference, v. 13,</p>	<p>(These are not symbolical, or very partially; but necessary to make the story complete.)</p> <p>Christian prudence, or forethought in the use of money.</p> <p>Prudence is good.</p> <p>We see the visible, but forget the invisible too readily.</p> <p>Forethought in the use of money commended.</p> <p>Fidelity to God in the use of property a test of character.</p> <p>Unfaithfulness here shuts us out from trusts hereafter.</p> <p>Fidelity to God incompatible with avarice or prodigality.</p>
THE TWO SONS, . Matt. xxi. 28-32.	XVII. . .	<p>The father, . . . .</p> <p>The first son, . . . .</p> <p>The second son, . . . .</p>	<p>God.</p> <p>Immoral persons who repent.</p> <p>Pharisees who do not repent.</p>
THE GREAT SUPPER, Luke xiv. 15-24.	XVIII. . .	<p>The householder, . . . .</p> <p>The supper, . . . .</p> <p>The first invited, . . . .</p> <p>Invitation, . . . .</p> <p>Excusing, . . . .</p> <p>Report to the lord, . . . .</p> <p>Second invitation, . . . .</p> <p>Streets and lanes, . . . .</p>	<p>Christ.</p> <p>Salvation.</p> <p>Jews "bidden" or notified by prophets, now invited by Christ.</p> <p>Preaching, or other mode of offering salvation.</p> <p>Unbelief justifying itself.</p> <p>God's omniscience.</p> <p>To the Gentiles.</p> <p>Inhabitants of Palestine and vicinity.</p>



THE PARABLE.	LECTURE.	TYPE.	ANTITYPE.
		Poor, maimed, &c., . . .	Gentiles, so regarded by the Jews.
		Third invitation, . . .	To entire Pagan world.
		Highway, &c., . . .	To most abandoned.
LOST SON RETURNED, Luke xv. 11-32.	XX. . .	(This is so fully explained in the Lecture it needs no analysis here.)	
LIGHT OF THE WORLD, Matt. v. 14.	XXI. . .	The world, . . .	Mankind.
		The light, . . .	Christian influence.
THE TARES IN THE WHEAT, Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43.	XXII. . .	The field, . . .	Universal visible church. (explained in the text.)
		Sowers, seeds, harvest, Men sleeping, . . .	Imperfect power of good men imperfectly employed.
THE VINEYARD, Matt. xxi. 33-44.	XXIII. . .	Servants, . . .	Reformers, good and bad.
		The householder, . . .	God.
		The vineyard, . . .	The interests of religion.
		The husbandmen, . . .	The Jewish nation.
		Householder's absence,	Period from Moses to the destruction of Jerusalem.
		Time of fruit and sending servants,	The expectation of results from prophetic messages.
		Their treatment of the servants,	The treatment of the prophets by the early Jews.
		Other servants sent, . . .	Succession of prophets.
		The son, . . .	Jesus Christ.
		Their remarks about him,	The envy of the Jewish rulers at Christ's growing influence.
		Cast him out and slew him,	Christ excommunicated and slain beyond the walls of Jerusalem.
		The lord's coming, . . .	The Roman army.
		The vineyard let out, . . .	The Gentile churches become ascendant.
THE MUSTARD SEED, Matt. xiii. 31-32.	XXIV. . .	The mustard-seed, . . .	Christ's Church.
THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR, Luke xvi. 19-31.	XXV. . .	(No one is authorized to affirm or deny that this is a literal narrative, with a slight addition of figurative description. It is certainly figurative in speaking of the rich man's lifting up his eyes, calling on Abraham, calling for water, and entreating Lazarus to be sent to the earth. They describe mental operations after death has separated the spirit from the body.)	
THE DRAG-NET, Matt. xiii. 47-50,	XXVI. . .	The Net, . . .	The Gospel affecting men
		The act of drawing, . . .	Efforts to save men.
		(The rest is sufficiently explained by the text.)	
THE ABSENT KING, Luke xix. 11-27.	XXVII. . .	The nobleman, . . .	Christ.
		His going away, . . .	Interval to the last day.
		Calling his servants, . . .	The last account.
		"Occupy till I come," . . .	Investment with our gifts.
		Citizens that hated him,	Jews, and all who refuse submission to Christ.
		They sent a message, . . .	Replies to ministers.
		His return, . . .	Death, or the judgment.
		(The rest is clear.)	
THE RICH FOOL, Luke xii. 15-21.	XXVIII. . .	(The only allegorical part seems to be the soliloquy and God's address; both of which are clear enough to every mind.)	



THE PARABLE.	LECTURE.	TYPE.	ANTITYPE.
THE BURIED TALENT, Matt. xxv. 14-30.	XXIX. .	(There are four parables somewhat similar, yet aiming at different points. That in Matt. xx. 1. describes a householder paying for labor performed. That in Matt. xxi. 33, describes a householder absent from home, sending for returns from his vineyard. That in Luke xix. 11, describes a nobleman looking for pecuniary returns for property entrusted. That in Matt. xxv. 14, describes a master likewise looking for interest, but with the peculiar feature of the buried talent, upon which our Lecture is founded.)	
THE PRINCE'S WED- DING, Matt. xxii. 1-14.	XXX. .	(This parable has some features resembling that in Luke xiv., yet they are quite distinct. In that, the first invited make excuses; in this, they boldly refuse. In that, the indignation of the king exhibits God's judgments on Israel for refusing the Gospel; and, also, its peculiar feature is that of the want of a wedding-garment: on which incident the Lecture is founded.)	
THE BARREN FIG- TREE, . Luke xiii. 6-9.	XXXI. .	The tree, . . .	Every person in Chris- tendom.
		The fruit, . . .	Holy obedience.
		The axe, . . .	Death of the impenitent.
THE TEN VIRGINS, Matt. xxv. 1-13.	XXXII. .	The virgins, . . .	Those indulging hope of salvation.
		Lamps, . . .	External religion.
		Wise and foolish, . . .	Prepared for heaven and unprepared.
		Oil and no oil, . . .	The Holy Spirit, or the Soul without him.
		Vessels, . . .	The heart.
		Bridegroom tarried, . . .	Lifetime.
		Midnight, . . .	Death.
		Appeal to the wise, and their reply,	Natural feelings on both sides.
		Door shut, . . .	Exclusion from heaven.

May He who taught these mighty truths by these simple emblems, condescend to bless this humble effort to exhibit His thoughts.

BOSTON, *January*, 1856.







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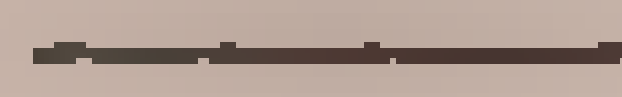
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" xxv. 1,	" XXXII.	John xv. 1,	" IV.







## INTRODUCTION.



*Lecture I.* Nature and Design of Parables.







## LECTURE I.

### NATURE AND DESIGN OF PARABLES.

MATT. XIII. 10-15. "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For, whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they, seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

THE word *mystery* is liable to be misunderstood, because, having several significations, that which is most frequently attached to it in English usage, was the least frequently intended by the sacred writers. Its different significations are: a thing that cannot be understood; a thing that has not been understood; and a thing that has a deeper meaning than that which is most obvious. Now, the first of these significations being prominent in our minds, while it is seldom that intended by the sacred writers, leads to misapprehension. For instance, in this passage the Saviour does not mean



by mysteries things that cannot be known ; because he says : “to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” And the disciples were to proclaim them to the world ; for, he thus commanded them : “What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops ; for, there is nothing hid (or mysterious) that shall not be known.” The term, “secret,” or, heretofore not understood, would represent its meaning in most cases. The third idea however is sometimes conveyed by it. For instance, Paul alluding to Eve’s being taken from Adam’s side, calls it a great mystery ; referring to Christ and the Church. That is, the historical fact was designed by God to be a parable ; to have a historical and a spiritual meaning ; even that of the Church deriving her very being from Christ, and consequently holding to him the most intimate and vital relation.

To you, says our Lord, “it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Other hearers fix their attention on the mere natural or historical part of the parables ; but you penetrate to their deeper meaning ; and so find the truths of the Gospel, which, to this day, have been a secret to mankind.

This was said to the disciples, in answer to their inquiry, why he taught the people in parables. The meaning and force of his reply we may discover, by considering

The nature of the Parable ; and  
The reasons for employing it.

### I. WHAT IS A PARABLE ?

It is a mode of instruction founded on the resemblances or analogies between spiritual and natural



objects or events. It consists of two parts—the form, and the substance ; or, the type, and the antitype.

1. *The form of the parable* is a direct or indirect statement of a fact, or a narrative of either some possible or real event, that had occurred once or frequently. The growth of the mustard-seed is a fact of constant occurrence. The course of the Prodigal Son, or of Dives and Lazarus, in all their details, may have been witnessed once, perhaps never. Customs, history, the relations of social and civil life, the members of the body, the laws of nature, all furnish resemblances to illustrate the kingdom of God. And of these the Great Preacher has availed himself nearly one hundred times, as recorded by the Evangelists. A few of them commence with the formula ; “the kingdom of heaven is like.” Some of them are directly called parables. But the larger part have no such indication of their figurative nature ; it being left to the good sense of mankind, as in all languages, to discriminate the figurative from the literal ; and it being taken for granted, that only a wilful perversion of language could suppose that our Lord is a literal door, or becomes literally bread ; or, that bread becomes an incarnate God.

The parable of Scripture differs from ordinary figurative language, not in its nature, but in its subject. And it might perhaps be correctly defined : a figurative description of religious doctrine.

2. To pass to the *substance of the parables*. We find their themes mainly to be—the sublime truths of grace, redemption, and retribution ; the soul, its responsibilities and its destiny ; the Church, and its destiny. Our Lord, when speaking of their design, says, “to you it



is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Matthew tells us that his preaching in parables was alluded to prophetically in the 78th Psalm: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." This kingdom is the dominion of Jesus Christ over the souls that have submitted to him. And the parables select various phases of it, showing how it begins in the heart; the importance of it; the social aspects of it; its progress; its embarrassments; its final triumph; and the glory of its true subjects; with the ruin of its enemies, secret or avowed.

We may now propose the same inquiry with the apostles:

## II. WHY DID THE LORD JESUS CHRIST TEACH BY PARABLES?

Two reasons he here assigns; the third is obviously seen in their very nature.

1. *He designed to show the union between nature, human life, and the Gospel.* His presence among men was itself a manifestation of the divine in the human, the invisible in the visible, the supernatural in the natural. The parable is a similar clothing of the unknown in the known, the heavenly in the earthly; and we therefore see a fitness in the peculiar frequency with which he uses this form of instruction. But it also shows that the whole empire of nature is an image of the empire of grace; that the laws of nature are reflections of the laws of grace; that man was made in the likeness of God; and that there is much in man by which we are to arrive at an acquaintance with God. The figurative illustrations employed by our Saviour



give us the proof that although sin has destroyed the harmony of God's kingdom, and led to a great abuse of nature, yet there remains an unbroken harmony still. And rightly understood, all nature may be our teacher, guiding us back to God. The close study of these similes greatly tends to form the habit of associating with the incidents of life, and the scenes and operations of nature, those sublime and holy truths which reclaim us from sin and the power of worldly interests. Had Christ resorted to metaphysical exhibitions of the principles of religion, and never given us these exquisitely simple and beautiful parables, the human mind would have failed of an impulse and impression which have developed some of the finest effusions of poetry, opened to millions the door to the sweetest communion with nature, and, at the same time, counteracted the powerful tendency to divorce science and religion.

Another object was—

2. *To unveil the mysteries of redemption.* Figurative language is adapted to all minds. It has depths for the philosopher; it is not too deep for the child. It has an admirable power of gradually admitting light to the mental eye. At the same time, by seizing the mind so quickly through the channel of its natural interest in human events and surrounding objects, it awakens the attention of the young, of the ignorant and the careless. Its form is instantly comprehended by all, while it gives the impression that there is a substance lying beneath. This prompts inquiry. And then the advantage is, that the memory can easily retain the story; and with it, whatever degree of spiritual light the mind may have received.



But there are particularly two features of the parable which fit it to be the channel of religious instruction, and which claim our special attention.

The analogies of nature and human life are among the most instructive sources of divine knowledge, when rightly employed. The mysteries of the kingdom cannot be learned from reasoning. There is indeed that in the human understanding, which, when delivered from perverting influences, can receive them; but it can never originate them. Neither can man's unaided observation find them in nature and man's life. But when the Most High comes among us himself as a teacher, calling on nature and life to reflect the light of his glory, then they obey. At his call they answer truly. And gloriously can the lily then teach. The stars, the stones are full of truth. But they will no longer impart it to our sinful race, until he that has come to reconcile all things under one head, mediates between us. The instant he bids them speak, they utter words of heavenly wisdom, of eternal truth, of infinite grace. The sower and his seed contain the germ of momentous truths. And when Christ points to them, and declares, they mean this,—then the meaning flashes forth. The mind discovers a common law in material and spiritual sowing. That simple operation throws back a heavenly light on Christ and his servants, their feelings, their labors; the spiritual effects, and the eternal results of them. There is a power in that analogy which no abstract description, no general reasoning can equal. The tares have a lesson to teach; not something forced upon them; not some artificial mnemonics, by which the memory should retain the divine truth. But the divine teacher opens to view



the intrinsic and real analogy between them and man's spiritual relations. And there is yet more than this power of instruction in natural objects. There is also a power of conviction. It is not the conviction which logic produces ; but altogether deeper, where the heart is not so perverted as to quench the light. He who created the grain of mustard-seed, is the Author and King of the heavenly world. And he has been pleased to give both the same law of development ; so that when a person of unsophisticated mind hears a statement of the common law that controls them both, he is not only instructed, he is also convinced. When Christ compares a man hearing and regarding his word, to a man building his house on a rock, and abiding in safety amid the storms of time and eternity ; and on the contrary, a man disregarding his word, to one building on the sand, and perishing in the destructive torrent, there is something in the human heart that instantly recognizes the truth in the analogy ; an argument in a similitude.\*

The parable is an admirable instrument to unveil spiritual truth. But it is also equally adapted,

3. *To conceal the Truth.* “That, seeing, they might not see,” is the divine declaration of its intention. This is, indeed, stating it in the strongest form. For, it might be said, that the prominent reason for the use of it was its adaptedness to the preacher's purpose of instruction ; and also, the fondness, particularly of

\* “Men are wont to say, that parables prove nothing ; nevertheless, comparisons often teach by depth of meaning infinitely more and better than all abstract arguments ; seeing they are derived from nature, the mirror of the glory of the unseen God, living demonstrations, as it were, of the Most High God himself.”—*Olshausen*.



Oriental people, for this form of instruction. When that is said, valid and genuine reasons are given. But if no more were said, a most important view of the case would be overlooked. It must be remembered that his audiences were a very mixed multitude; representing almost every class in society. The truth must be presented to all; but in such a way as to do the least injury, and the greatest good. While, then, to a portion of his hearers the parable presented the truth to the utmost advantage, it was equally desirable in reference to another portion. There were those so weak in prejudice, though sincere, that the truth must come to them perfect in substance, but enveloped in a form that at first almost concealed it from them. Neither their national nor their sectarian feelings could at first tolerate the full statement that the Gentiles should enter the Church, on a level with the favored people. Accordingly he veils the important fact under the image of a great supper, to which the King invited guests from the highways and hedges. And to them a hint was given in the story of the good Samaritan.

He aimed again at avoiding a premature irritation of his enemies. Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, elders and priests; proud, earthly, ignorant, bigoted, envious and murderous, were continually acting as spies around him. It was therefore indispensable that he should avoid giving them any ground of accusation before the Sanhedrim, the civil tribunal, or the people. While then he gives them tremendous thrusts, his meaning is so couched in imagery, that they never got a plausible charge against him, from any of his discourses. He told them that theirs was a religion of words merely; and that publicans and harlots would



enter the kingdom of heaven, from which they would be excluded. But it was not wise always to state it in plain terms. Therefore he told them of two sons who were commanded by their father to go and work in his vineyard; describing them by the one who promised to go, but did not go. And then he drew from them a sentence against themselves. He described to them again the wickedness which they were about to perpetrate; but he described it by husbandmen that first killed the messengers of their King, and then, the Son. And under that disguise he declared that God would fearfully overthrow their nation for this sin. He told them he was going away to get a kingdom; to return and judge men according to their faithfulness or unfaithfulness to him; but it was in the parable of the Talents.

The main design of concealment, however, is one that runs through all the works and providence of God. And hence our Lord explains it by a principle of universal application: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that he hath." Man is on probation. Astronomical truth lies hidden in the heavens. He that wants it, may get it; but by desire and effort. Gold is in the mountains, but desire and effort alone secure it. Truth is in books and in the mind; but by desire and effort alone can we get it. The parable is a branch of probation. "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given." This does not touch the ground of sovereignty, but of probation; "for, whosoever hath," &c. The French have a proverb; "it is the first step that costs." If any man loves truth enough to begin to search for it, he



conquers the great difficulties in the beginning. In this probationary state truth is everywhere in parables. There is, what rhetoricians call, the protasis and the apodosis. The protasis is the parable. The explanation is the apodosis. The disciples were perplexed that their Lord gave out the protasis, and not the apodosis. His vindication was : that they who desire truth, and will seek for it, shall find it. But it will not force itself upon them against their wills. These men, said he, seeing, see not ; and this is not unusual, nor unanticipated ; for Isaiah prophesied of it six hundred years ago. Their heart, he says, is waxed gross. That is, they are sensual, worldly, careless, proud, opposed to the truth ; they love the darkness more than the light. And therefore I put the truth before them in such forms that if they want the light, they can get it ; but if they choose to stop at the mere form and shell, they may.

The contemplation of our Saviour's mode of teaching enhances our estimate of his word. Let us mark the simplicity of these parables. They are in perfect contrast to the metaphysics of the schools ; to the pompous displays of learning and ornament ; to the vagaries of fancy which distinguish so generally the writings of that day. On the one hand, every thing he taught was weighty and full of dignity ; but the form in which he clothed it in the parables, was the most simple, natural, and easily comprehensible. If we may employ the comparison, he was like Franklin using the kite, a child's toy, to bring lightning from the clouds, and make it subservient to man's necessities. The sublimest truths were brought to the most common apprehension, by the simplest means.



Mark, too, the weightiness of his instructions. It appears not to have been impassioned. But it was most impressive. We are now so familiar with the great principles he has inculcated in the parables, that they have ceased to strike our attention. But we must remember that our indebtedness is the same as if we had just heard them. They are now incorporated into men's minds, and into their literature. They have aided in the vast work of elevating man; and they are still to go forth among other nations; new generations of children are to read them; heathen tribes are to be enlightened by them; and Oriental people are again to be favored with them as a new revelation. He has put the key into the hands of all men for unlocking the real treasures of spiritual wisdom that lie concealed in nature, in man, and in the constitution of human society.

The boldness and fidelity of these parables command our admiration. They chase the human heart into its subtle windings, and expose to it there, most faithfully, its evils and its dangers. With all the concealment in them, there was enough apparent to make the most worldly see that the Lord was reproving them. Jesus never needlessly inflicted a wound on others. But he neither sought men's admiration, nor hesitated to incur their displeasure, if declaring to them necessary truth would offend them. Take his parable of the Rich fool, of the spendthrift Son, of Dives and Lazarus, as specimens of the most uncompromising boldness that the annals of public speaking can produce.

There is, too, an admirable weight of authority in the parables. He does not utter opinions, nor give advice. He speaks as one having authority; not in another's name, but his own. He declares things as



they are, and leaves the mind in no doubt about them. This is to us invaluable ; for, there are so many influences tending continually to keep the mind unsettled on points of the first moment. It is always argument sufficient for us that Jesus Christ says ; the kingdom is like. Then we know it is like.

And then we are indebted to him for teaching us what is the true study of nature. The scientific study brings us to general facts, which we call laws ; and to classify objects ; in some cases to perceive God's thoughts and plan in his works. But the parables reveal to us in natural objects, and in human nature and events, the highest truths ; the soul in its experience, duties, and destiny ; God in his moral attributes, and especially his *grace*.

How great an evil is it then to slight these instructions ! Nothing more certainly brings the divine judgments upon the soul. And the greatest of them in this life, is that the truth itself should harden the heart.

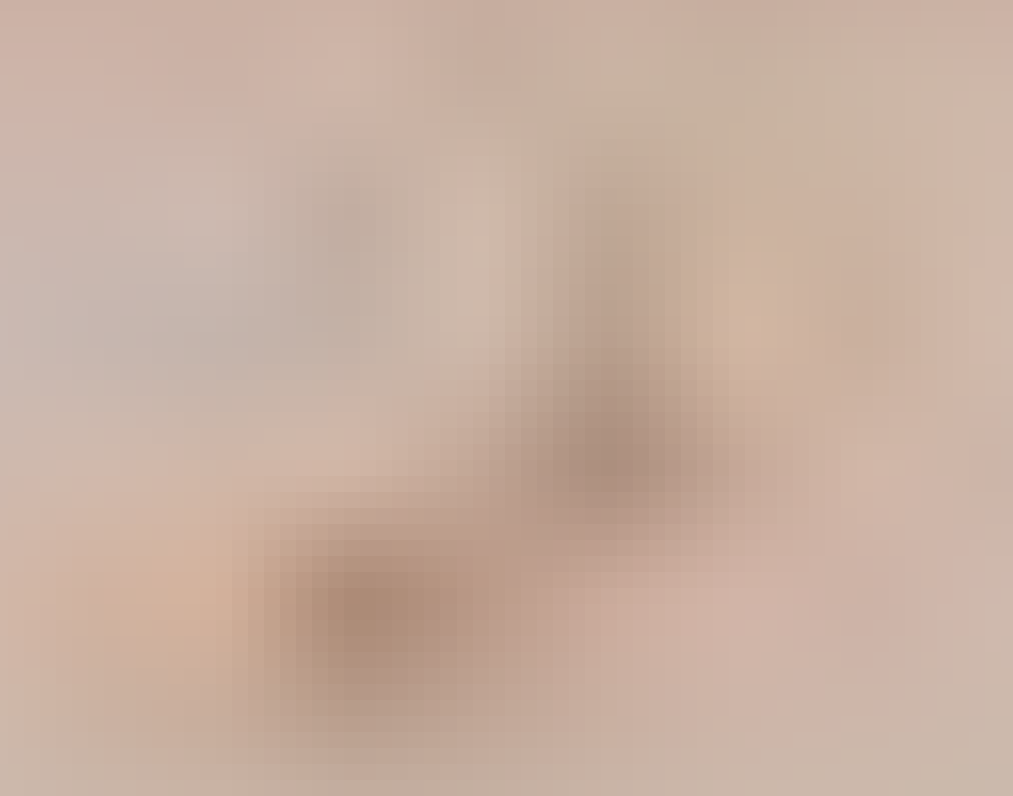
God will continue teaching in the parables of Scripture ; in the story of Dives and Lazarus, the Ten Virgins, the Publican and Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, and the Men building on the sand, or the rock.—God will continue to teach in the parables of Nature, the Sun, the Vine, the Bread, and the Tares ;—in the constitution of man and of society ; in the relations of Father and Son ; the existence and actions of Justice ; the Stewards ; and the Kings of the earth. Yet all this will be to many utterly unprofitable. Seeing and hearing, they will neither see nor hear. But they must render an account for their rejection of such instruction.

Here is encouragement to inquirers. The Saviour explained to those who asked for explanation. This



desire to know, is just what he has aimed to arouse in you ; and if it is awakened, he will meet it. You complain that you cannot see clearly the meaning of his word, here and there. Depend upon this ; if it is important for you to know it now, if you study his word, if you ask for light from him, he will give it. The mysteries of heaven shall become the treasures of your soul ; a heavenly light shall shine upon your earthly path. Go then, like these docile disciples, and ask him who uttered these mysterious truths, to explain them to you.





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## PART I.

### THE GOSPEL.

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§ 1. NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

*Lect.* II. Origin and Authority of the Gospel.

§ 2. DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

*Lect.* III. Vindication of the mercy it reveals.

§ 3. ITS INITIATORY REQUIREMENT, AND GENERAL EFFECT.

*Lect.* IV. The Vine and its Branches—Faith in Christ, and union with Him.

§ 4. ITS SUBSEQUENT REQUIREMENTS, AND PRACTICAL EFFECTS.

*Lect.* V. The Leaven—Piety internal and progressive.

“ VI. The Growing Seed—Growth in piety.

“ VII. The two Debtors—Deep convictions producing deep piety.

“ VIII. The Laborers employed and paid—Humility in regard to merits.

“ IX. The Pharisee and Publican—Humility in Prayer.

“ X. The Importunate Widow—Importunity in Prayer.

“ XI. The good Samaritan—Kindness.

“ XII. The relentless Servant—Forgiveness.

“ XIII. The unjust Steward—True foresight.







## LECTURE II.

THE SOWER; OR, THE ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY OF THE GOSPEL.

MATT. XIII. 3. "Behold! a sower went forth to sow."

THAT is a beautiful sight in itself, and awakens a delightful train of reflections. The sower is a man of faith and hope. He renounces the present for the future. He seems to be encouraged by beholding an invisible presence, and by hearing an inaudible voice, to cast himself and his dependent family upon the kindness of one who, though unseen, is never far from us. "Behold! a sower went forth to sow." Stop, and observe him; it will repay you; for you cannot but see something profoundly suggestive and instructive here. To an observer unacquainted with the process of vegetation, this man would seem to be throwing away his bread. But he is not. And yet if he should come to know enough more about the process, to discover what combined influences are necessary to bring the grain to maturity, and realize the hopes of the sower, he might think it was a discouraging process. The temperature of the ground must come up to fifty and sixty degrees of our heat-measure; but while he is sowing it is down to forty degrees. Who then is to



raise it twenty degrees? The seed, the soil, or the man? There must be just such a degree of moisture; neither too much nor too little. Who then shall water those thirsty fields? There are to float on invisible wings ten thousand little carriers of gases; and ten thousand unseen hands are to convey electric impulses to the shooting grain. But who shall guarantee their working in right time, and in due degrees? Surely this sowing is a wonderful work, although we see it ten times a day. The sowing and the reaping are connected by wonderful links of invisible power and unappreciated goodness. The soil has a power, and the seed has a power; but both combined are valueless, unless an infinitely greater power shall be exercised. And that power is under no human control or guidance. "The wind bloweth where it listeth."

What did Jesus intend by calling our attention to the sower? Only to point us to something unspeakably more wonderful and beautiful; for, he soon passes from the figure to its sense, and calls the seed "the word of the kingdom." This kingdom is in fact the great theme of the parables. It is called, indiscriminately, the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of God; a community in which God reigns over a willing, loyal, and fraternal people. It is the new government to which our King restores all that having rebelled, are now desirous and determined to return to their allegiance. The rebellion having taken place, and continuing, under the power of a lie, the restoration must take place under the power of Truth; of a department of truth altogether peculiar in its adaptations to the mind and heart of an apostate race. It is here called the Word of the Kingdom.

This opening parable of our Lord is occupied with



the treatment that word receives from men ; and so interesting and important is that theme, we shall devote successive days to the successive stages of it, as our Lord here describes them. To-day we shall find enough for our meditations in the Sower and his Seed.

The man who sows, has an end in view. On that his heart is set. His imagination paints the scene of the first tender germ shooting up from the earth ; its gradual, steady, healthful growth ; its tall, firm stalk ; its bearded grain ; its waving, golden sea of ripened corn ; the joyfulness of the abundant harvest ; and the grain safely garnered. So is the heart of the great Sower set on the process of growth ; and especially on the end, when “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.” The sower wisely selects, in reference to established laws, the means which are adapted to this end. Herein is the Son of God *The Sower*.

The analogy holds good in two points : the seed is not in the soil ; but it has essential adaptations to it. In other words, this parable presents to our view, as its groundwork :

The nature of the Gospel as a revelation ;

The contents of the Gospel as an instrument of redemption.

I. CHRIST CAME TO REVEAL GOD. I understand revelation to be contrasted with

1. *Speculation*. The human mind is limited in its range of knowledge, and yet has an unlimited sphere opened to it. If it gets a new discovery of truth from itself, it is by speculation ; a term perhaps in this sense of it derived from the Latin, *speculum*, a mirror. When the mind is fixed in certain positions like a mirror, it



catches new rays of light; new images are revealed upon it. Now this is what we mean by reflection; another term applied equally to the mirror. It includes the power of discovering the various relations and general forms of truth by meditation. And in this sense philosophy is contrasted with revelation. Whatever truth a man learns by his own meditations, he indeed really learns from God, because God gave him the power of generalizing; and for this very purpose. But it is still a very different mode of acquiring knowledge from that of revelation; where general facts are communicated, which might never have been reached through the speculative faculty; and particular facts also, which could not be known but by testimony. The word of the kingdom is a seed which is not in the ground, but must be brought to it. So far however as this argument from analogy goes, it might be replied,—Why, the case is right against your doctrine; is not the very seed that is sown the product of the soil? It is a question calling for an answer, and which I cheerfully give. If we look at the analogy more accurately we shall see its completeness. Several philosophers have endeavored to show that what we call creation is only development; that every thing which exists, originally came by an unconscious, involuntary energy, from something that went before it, different perhaps in the degree of its excellence, but yet really producing it. Now this theory is brought to the ground by the power of revelation, to those who believe it; and by the progress of science to those who are acquainted with that. Moses, the inspired historian of God's earthly kingdom, and keeper of its annals, says: "In the beginning God created the



earth.” “And God said: Let the earth bring forth the herb yielding seed.” The seed then was created, like the heavens and the earth, by a divine word. It indeed came forth from the earth, but because it had first been given to the earth by the divine word. Its first existence was a new stage in the process of creation. Before that event there had been consolidation of gases into fluids, liquids and solids; there had been crystallization of minerals, as their highest imitation of vegetable life. But the two great periods of the nebulous, and the mineral, had passed away before the grasses were produced, containing in themselves the seeds by which their kind should be perpetuated. Thus the Scripture informs us of the origin of seeds.

Then science shows us the great shelves of nature’s vast geological museum, on which are laid, in some degree of chronological order, the products of different ages. The development-theory, to be sustained by science, should present to us a regular gradation of vegetables and animals, corresponding to the successive layers and strata of successive periods. But, instead of any thing of the kind, we often find a perfect development of a species lying in the earth in the same chronological niche with a more imperfect form of the same, which ought, by this theory, to have been utterly extinct ages before the former could be produced. And then if we leave analogy, and pass to consider literally the truths of the Scriptures, the point is settled that they never sprang up spontaneously, or by speculation, in the human mind. A hundred illustrations of this might be readily selected. There is a purity, a majesty, a sublimity, a simplicity, a sanctity in the Scriptural manifestation of the Deity, that never originated in the



human mind. No ; that sower went forth from a higher world, who sowed that seed here on this earth. As first recorded for us, it was found in Egypt and the Arabian desert, at a period when there was no such learning in the schools. The earth was corrupt, and dark, and idolatrous ; but in the midst of the darkness a pure and divine light lay on the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. And from Moses to John, the same view of the divine nature, perfections, dominion and purposes, are continued with unbounded variety, with all the evidence of personal conviction and individual feeling in the writers, but at the same time, possessing a perfect, mysterious, superhuman unity. Then we might select the law of human action, and the standard of human character ; especially as exhibited in the Lord Jesus Christ ; we might even say, in Abraham, Moses, Daniel, and Paul. We might take the broad, grand sweep of history and prophecy combined, and say—this is not from man, but from God. We might take the scheme of redemption, beginning in an obscure promise at the apostacy ; gradually unfolding, gathering new materials, maturing itself ; until in the fulness of time the universe beheld the Deity exhibiting the great thought of eternity, the key-stone of the plans of infinite wisdom, the key-note of eternal anthems. Surely this came not from the speculations of Moses, or David, of John or of Paul. This was revealed. The world by wisdom knew not God ; then holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And the confirmation of this grows stronger as you go into the details of the Scriptures. Once admitting them to be true, and you must also admit that the principal parts never came from man's meditations. The creation no man could describe, from



eye-sight nor from speculation. By faith we must believe “that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear.”

But we cannot afford time to press this argument farther. I understand revelation to be thus in contrast with speculation ; and also, with

2. *Argument or Reasoning.*—Here we need to discriminate. There are many specimens of reasoning in the Scriptures. Reason is a noble faculty in the human mind, needed at every step on earth, and for ever in heaven. Paul reasoned, Jesus reasoned. How then can we say that the Gospel of Christ is a revelation, and not an argument? Our meaning is: that the Scriptures do not depend for their power upon a process of reasoning, but upon Divine testimony ; that true faith in the Scriptures is confidence in that testimony. Select a few of the main features, and see how the case stands.

The great fact of God’s existence is not reasoned, but affirmed. Its sublime opening sentence is : “In the beginning Elohim created.” But who is Elohim? Is he himself a creation ; or, does he exist from the necessity of the case, or by some previous volition? Does he, in announcing his existence, appeal to some admitted facts in the human mind, as premises, and then proceed to deduce an irresistible conclusion? If such argumentation is found in the Bible, it is not in the Pentateuch, nor often in other parts. Their principal stress is laid on positive affirmations, and historical statements of the Divine acts.

The prophecies, threatenings and promises of the Bible do not come through the reasoning faculty. The



history of Creation is not an argument. The history of the Church ; the biographies, the devotional feelings expressed in the Psalms ; Adam's apostacy ; its consequences to us ; the atonement of Christ ; the offers of eternal life ; the descriptions of the judgment, of hell and heaven ; the immortality of the soul ; the efficacy of prayer ; the mediation of Christ ; the Trinity ; the agency of the Holy Ghost, are not reasoned ; they are affirmed and explained. Objections indeed are answered ; but that process presumes the existence of a revealed fact, and then merely shows it to be in harmony with other facts, and with man's enlightened reason.

Where is the law of God founded upon an argument ? "Thou shalt ; thou shalt not," is its language, and its spirit. No ; it is not to the logical part of our nature that God has addressed his word ; but to that which we may call the moral sense, or religious sentiment. If he had depended on mere reasoning, there would have been many defects in the Scriptures as a book for mankind. How, for instance, could the simple understand the profoundness of that argumentation which would be necessary to prove every thing ? Samuel Clarke undertakes to represent a process of reasoning, by which God's existence is demonstrated. How many can understand his arguments ? What proportion of this uneducated, care-absorbed race, every study it ; and who of the learned believes one whit the more for all his logic ? Then again, the Bible would have been as dry as the tomes of philosophy ; as uninviting to the sick, the weary, the child, the soul oppressed with sin, and longing for one kind word of promise from an offended Saviour. Then again ; God would have assumed to his



creatures the attitude, not of a Sovereign to be obeyed on account of his authority ; a Father to be believed on his own testimony or promise ; but a teacher of Philosophy, a master of Logic ; whose success and fame depend on his skill in argument.

There is indeed reasoning in the Scriptures. The parables are all in one of the forms of logic. But it is not the demonstrative, or that form which finds its premises in the intuitive axioms of the human mind. The mind must indeed believe something, or even a revelation cannot be made to it. But the difference between these parables and formal reasoning may be illustrated by a pupil before his teacher, learning through argument. The teacher can affirm nothing by his own veracity, so far as pure reasoning goes ; he can enjoin nothing by authority. And when he has finished, the pupil knows all that he has learned, by the independent operations of his own mind. He then returns to his father's house. There the voice of authority meets him, stating the parental will ; there the voice of affection meets him, cheering his heart ; there the voice of truth meets him, testifying to facts. The father may explain, he may show the consistency of one thing with another. But surely the process in the school has been very different from that in the family. And the two produce very different, though entirely harmonious results on the mind of the child. The parables are explanations, summoning nature and human life to testify to the realities of God's kingdom. Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures. He gave an exposition of what the Scriptures meant ; always founding his argument upon things already believed on divine authority. The epistles to the Romans,



the Galatians and the Hebrews, are entirely of this kind. The discourse in Athens is the nearest to an argument of the schools, of any thing found in the Scriptures. But in the Sermon on the Mount we have the most complete illustration of what I am affirming. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," is its opening sentence. And so it proceeds. Here "he spake as one having *authority*." And that characterizes the Bible. Neither its History, its Prophecy, the Law, nor the Gospel, are founded upon processes of argumentation; they are to be believed because God affirms them. Reason may properly ask for evidence that he does. Only there let her beware. If she assumes her own unbiassed readiness to hear God speak, and her infallible readiness to recognize his voice, she knows not herself, nor her associates. The Word of God is to be believed, because He affirms it; and He will hold his children responsible to recognize His voice. In this, as in nature, the truth lies open. He that has a heart for truth finds it, and is led by it into the paths of life: he that loves darkness more than light, is "given over to strong delusion to believe a lie," and falls into the snares of death. Man is on probation, not so much to test the soundness of his reasoning powers, as to ascertain whether he will accept of a ransom and of a remedy for the diseases, disorders and curse of his moral nature; and the Bible is the great instrument of God's government in this probationary course.

It only remains now to state in regard to the nature of the Gospel as a revelation, that it is a

3. *Direct unveiling of Truth*.—It is called a mystery hidden from ages. Man labored up the steeps of logic, plied the powers of argument, sounded the depths



of reason, and where did he come out at last? "The world by wisdom knew not God." The highest point Grecian acuteness reached was, to inscribe an altar to "the unknown God." "For after that, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. As it is written; eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

If we do not see and believe this feature of the word, I know not how we are to sit at the feet of Jesus. He speaks as one having authority. He says: "it is written." He affirms that all things written in the law and the prophets are true; and that if we do not believe the Scriptures, there is no hope for us. If we do not see this feature of the word, we cannot comprehend the parable of the sower. The seed is the Word. Whose word? Socrates', Plato's, Paul's? No; the Word of the living God. Revelation is the result of inspiration, or special, infallible divine communication to the writers, to secure their knowing what could be known only by a direct divine communication; their remembering what divine wisdom would have them remember and state; their expressing it in language that most fully exhibits the Divine thought. If the language of the whole is not as infallible as the language of the Ten Commandments, then man can have no revelation. Many believe that the apostles and prophets were inspired; that is, lifted out of the ordinary state of human thought in receiving the subjects to be communicated in this book; but that they were no more inspired in



expressing their thoughts, than Milton was in writing *Paradise Lost*. But if Paul was infallible in his conception of the truth, and yet left to his human fallibility when he came to express it, what certainty have I in reading his writings? How can they bind my conscience, or awaken my belief in truths which transcend experience and reason? Even those who believe in the inspiration of the men, and not of the book, believe that we have in the original of the decalogue the very words which God wrote by a miraculous operation. Probably no one of us would venture to criticise or correct them. But if the rest of the Word is not as really God's as that, then we have, so far, no infallible revelation; for just where the conscience ought to be bound, there the reason may find an objection; just where the foot is to be planted for eternity upon a declaration or promise of God who cannot lie, there it may tread upon thin ice: some poor word that Paul in his weakness put in there, blundering out his imperfect notions of divine things. Oh! give me a word from God, for my soul; not from Paul, nor Moses, but from the living God.

We now turn to the contents of the Gospel as an instrument of redemption.

## II. THE SON OF GOD CAME TO REVEAL GOD IN CHRIST.

I speak of his coming, in its broad sense. When it is said, Christ went and preached to the spirits imprisoned in Noah's day; when it is said, "neither let us tempt Christ" as the Jews did in the wilderness; when Peter speaks of the Spirit of Christ in the ancient prophets, we have the fact revealed, that the Son of God was in the beginning with the Church. "By him were the worlds created." By the coming of Christ



then, we understand all the exhibitions made of God through, and to the Church, from the beginning to the end of time. "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." It is a revelation of God; but of God in Christ. It contains then, as the instrument of redemption, or as the word of the kingdom,

1. *The ground, extent, and consequences of man's controversy with God.* That these should be stated, is, for many reasons, indispensable to a vindication of the providence of God. If we are not rebels, our position is a reproach to God; our maladies, wastings and dying; our darkness, sorrows, and fears are inexplicable. But our murmuring must turn to self-reproach; our complaining, to repentance; our despondency, to inquiries after the way of deliverance; our levity, to a serious view of the sorrows and the gloomy ending of life, when it is recognized that we have revolted from God; and then we must see God's treatment of us to be just. Ignorant of our sinfulness, we cannot know our relations to God, nor see that our natural claims on his kindness are forfeited, and that we are spared by his patience and mercy.

We need to see the urgency of our spiritual necessities, that we may escape from the control of our sluggishness, pride, worldliness, and ungodliness; which will keep us listless, dreaming and torpid through life, unless our consciences are thus thoroughly aroused.

We need to see what change must take place in our characters and in our treatment of God, and how we may be reconciled to him.

These influences the Word contains fully; in the law, the life of Christ, the lives of his saints; in the revelation of the final judgment and of destiny, of the



brevity of life, of the many impediments to our salvation, and our great liability to fail of it. The Scriptures contain, also,

2. *The ground and terms of reconciliation.* Man condemned and miserable must find the path that leads back to his father's house ; must hear a cheering voice urging his return ; and must feel the pressure of a friendly hand leading him back amid the darkness that surrounds spiritual things. He must know that one is waiting at the door to take him in.

Such is the Word of the kingdom. It is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Its theme is redemption, and Christ the Redeemer. The history and the prophecy point to him. The law is in his hands, as a Mediator intrusted with the conflicting interests of the two parties. In him the promises are all "yea and amen."

One has said : " inasmuch as Christ is the physician and the medicine ; the priest and the sacrifice ; the Redeemer and redemption ; legislator and law ; porter and door ; so he is the sower and seed. For, the Gospel is only Christ incarnate ; born, preaching, dying, rising, sending the Spirit, gathering the Church, sanctifying and governing it." " I am the way, the truth, and the life." Many think it enough to know the terms of salvation, without troubling themselves with the grounds of it. But not to say, that faith, one of those terms, involves a knowledge of the grounds, it is obvious that we must know them, because the mode of our reconciliation with God is a matter of supreme importance. If he displays indifference to the precept of his law in saving us, our respect for it is destroyed. If he displays indifference to its penalty, then all our



prejudices against it are aroused, and the whole authority of God as moral governor is broken. If he cannot rightly annex penalties to his laws, and if he cannot sternly execute them without betraying a want of benevolence, then government is at an end; the Cross is the grand instrument of rebellion, the Gospel a proclamation of anarchy. Fellow-man, will you see this point? The Godhead of Christ, his expiatory sufferings having reference to the curse of the law, are the chief points in the Gospel. Thus law and government are upheld, while man is pardoned and restored; thus Justice presides with Mercy at that banquet where the prodigal sits down again at the family festival, clothed, cleansed, forgiven, welcomed, sadly happy, at rest, and full of hope! The Word contains, also,

3. *The motives to reconciliation.* This is the third great requisite. It is not enough for man only to know; he must also be moved. The voluntary or active power in us requires two kinds of influence,—repulsion and attraction. Some persons count it a degradation that their wills should have two handles, instead of one. They insist upon it that they are “never to be driven;” they are not to be “frightened into religion;” they “never did fear future punishment;” it is “beneath the greatness of man to be urged by fear.” And thus they contend with the Gospel, because it drives as well as draws. But if it had not these two cords, it would betray a human instead of a divine origin. If some men had invented the Gospel, they would have made it all terror; others would have made it all invitation. God has blended the two in the Scriptures, just as he has in nature.



Every step you take, every word you utter in this world, is under two influences—fear and hope. And the more wise you become, the more fully you become aware of the dangers that beset you when you walk and when you speak. You are not always in a fright ; you may be very tranquil, or very happy ; and yet your cautiousness is kept awake by your knowledge of yourself, of your fellow-men, and of the world in which you live. Fear and hope ; fear and hope on every side make the wholesome discipline of life. The Gospel is framed by him who knows what is in man. Its truths appeal to fear and hope in extreme degrees. Nothing half-way has place there. If it takes hold upon you, it will make you earnest, as it made Paul and Peter, Luther and Henry Martyn. If this seed drops into your heart, and takes root there without obstruction, one of its fruits will be *Earnestness* ;—earnestness for your own sake, for others' sake, for Christ's sake. He was earnest in prayer ; and “was heard, in that he feared.” Paul was earnest, lest after having warned other men, he himself should be a castaway. Jude was earnest, and would make others so ; “pulling them,” he says, “out of the fire.”

The great motive-power of the Gospel inclines to Penitence, Love, Faith, Obedience, Hope and Prayer.

Then there is an infinite value in the Scriptures. They are the Word of the kingdom ; the seed of life for the human soul. They come clothed with that authority which our consciences need ; since, for our perfect sanctification we need both a divine law and a divine Sanctifier. They come, transcending our reason ; but meeting all its claims, by their miraculous accompaniments and history, by their singular purity of sentiment and



elevation of style. They come, fully adapted to relieve our profoundest wants ; teaching us that which we need to know of God and ourselves ; having the solution of our complex experience ; unveiling the future, and showing us the way of life.

May we not indulge the hope that we are approaching the golden age of Biblical study ? The barbarism of our indifference to the Bible will point many a future tale of the present period. God's primitive revelation was in matter ; the next, in providence ; then came the Word. Science is now doing her last great work with the primitive and inferior revelation in matter ; soaring to all the grandeurs of heaven, and plunging to the depths of earth for its secret stores of knowledge. This department of investigation must needs be completed ; then will come two studies to close the present dispensation for human intelligence, that of the letter of Scripture, and that of theology. But that day may come too late for some who now read this prediction. A veil will remain on their eyes until probation is ended, and destiny commenced. Remember, fellow-immortal, the parable of the sower ; for Jesus uttered it ; and in it he describes four classes of hearers. To one of these you must belong, for ever ! Remember, *that the power of the Word is not absolute.* Man remains free to resist and reject its influence. The truths are adapted to him ; even as a being fallen from his original excellence, and strongly disinclined to obey God's holy law.

The possession of this Word is not only a personal privilege, but also creates a responsibility to disseminate it. They to whom this seed is freely given, are bound to scatter it, treading in the footsteps of the



great Sower. How diligently he was engaged in this work ; how unsparing of himself ; often disregarding the claims of hunger and sleep ! But “if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

It is not wonderful that a man like Chalmers, who had so profoundly felt the transforming power of the Gospel, should have employed it confidently, as the indispensable and sufficient agency in transforming the vilest beings that infest the old cities of Europe. And our brethren are now abroad repeating the labors which once transformed pagan Europe ; which afterward reformed apostate Europe ; and which prepared the people who should found the civil and religious institutions of this land. We are repaying Asia and Europe the debt we owe them, when we send back to them the word of God’s redemption, which they have lost, to so great an extent. We are treading in the footsteps of the great Sower, when we go to the barren wastes of heathendom and of the papal dominions, and scatter this regenerating word of heavenly truth.

For our own beloved land there is hope, if this truth shall become the germ of our national character. We fear various evils for those who shall succeed us. But we may be assured that if the Word of God shall rule in our colleges, our halls of legislation, our families, and our hearts, the blessing of God will rest upon the nation, and nothing shall be able to harm it.



## LECTURE III.

### THE LOST SILVER AND THE LOST SHEEP; OR, GOD'S MERCY VINDICATED.

LUKE xv. 1-10. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*? And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

WE have seen that the kingdom of heaven, which forms the subject of the Parables, is a dispensation of Divine mercy. Had it been a dispensation of rigid justice, gloom and despair had hung over our guilty race, instead of that bright canopy now illuminated by the Sun of Righteousness, and by the stars of promise



when his beams are hid. Had it been a dispensation of partial kindness favoring the most self-conceited and formal, then the Pharisees had hailed it. But as it was, and is, a dispensation of mere mercy, of impartial kindness ; they hated it, and still hate it.

The Pharisees and Scribes were men who sought in religion, self-flattery ; the nourishment of pride, rather than its annihilation. They were disappointed and chagrined, that Jesus, a being of such lofty character, and with so many tokens of a heavenly commission, did not fall in with their notions, and strengthen their position.

This chagrin was provoked to hatred, when they saw irreligious people following Christ, and listening to his discourses with an earnestness with which they had never honored the jejune homilies of their authorized teachers. Their feelings were expressed in an objection to his course, which implied more than it uttered : “ this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them ; ” a charge implying that he associated with them, from either an insensibility to their wickedness, or a delight in it. He replied to their reproach in three parables ; all having the same meaning as arguments, but varying in their aspect. The first two are designed to justify God’s seeking the sinner ; the third comes to the case in hand, and vindicates with the most glorious, yet withering eloquence, God’s reception of the penitent.

We shall consider the first two together.

I. WHAT THEN IS THE MERCY OF GOD, AND WHAT DOES IT DO ?

*It is the kindness of God regarding man as lost.*  
“ God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten



Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Strange as it may seem to some persons, yet is it true, that nothing has called forth more intense opposition from the human heart than the manifestation of this feeling in God. The reason however is obvious. It assumes the fact that all are lost, unless their condition and character be changed. It makes nothing of imagined native excellence ; it throws an awful seriousness over life ; it pours contempt on much that men consider wise, and excellent, and important ; and stamps vanity on the hopes and struggles and toils of those who are greatest and wisest in their own conceit, and in other’s estimation. It is the enemy and annihilator of all the Pharisaism that ever has been, is, or shall be.

*It regards man as recoverable.* The obstacles to man’s recovery are vast ; the way is long, with a rugged ascent ; nay, to restore man to holiness and the divine favor, is impossible to any but the Son of God ; and even to him, except at an inconceivable cost. Yet man, sinful, blinded, wretched man ; yea, the most sinful may be reclaimed, regenerated, redeemed, restored, and blessed for ever in the presence of God.

*Mercy seeks his recovery.* “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost.” Doth not the shepherd “leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And again :

*Mercy rejoices in the salvation of man.* After having made atonement for his sins, and sent forth the word of grace and the renewing Spirit, and brought the soul of man to genuine repentance and faith in God, then “there is joy in heaven.” Now ;



## II. WHAT AVERSION DO MEN MANIFEST TO THAT ?

1. *That of indifference.* It were easy to show that indifference toward certain objects is impossible ; but that it is often convenient to make aversion put on the air of indifference. And it could also be shown that this exercise of the divine mercy is just one of those objects ; nay, that it is supremely true that no human being can be really indifferent to the intelligence conveyed to us in the Gospel. “ He that is not with me, is against me.” But as opposition assumes that position frequently, we must vindicate it against that. Then there is an aversion,

2. *Which manifests itself in objections.* These may be either expressed or secretly entertained. The hopelessness of great sinners is a settled position with the Pharisees of every land and every age. And therefore their main object is to keep at such a distance from these miserable creatures as to avoid contamination ; and, at the same time, to look with indifference, if not suspicion, upon all sympathy for them, and all efforts to recover them.

Another Pharisaic maxim is : Great changes in religious character are always to be regarded with suspicion, and treated with contempt or indifference ; and all labors for that end that are really serious and zealous, are to be regarded in the same light.

Another and kindred maxim is : Men are to be treated here, in all respects, according to their deserts. This was the principle by which Christ’s enemies aimed to destroy his influence. If he were a good man and a true prophet, he would associate with us familiarly, and show to the world how highly he esteemed us, while he



would treat these wretched publicans and sinners just as we do.

We then proceed to contrast with these views the grace of the Gospel, and thus,

### III. VINDICATE THE MERCY OF GOD.

In these parables a direct appeal is made to human feelings and actions. Assuming an analogy between the lost soul of man and the lost money and sheep, it lodges its appeal in the human heart. There is no formal argument, but that direct address which finds its way to the hearts of the candid. And yet, as in every work of God, however simple to the view of the simple, there is underlying, a principle deep and broad as the universe, enduring as eternity. Let us examine then,

1. *God's compassion for man demands from man the most interested attention, the most profound reverence, and the most lively gratitude.* Man is the crown of all God's terrestrial works, whether you consider his body or his spirit. Therefore, "the proper study of mankind is man." It matters not in what condition of social life you find him, he is still a man, the crowning work of his Maker. It matters not in what condition you find his body, it never can be worthy of your contempt. There are many things that make it majestic in its ruins. The temples of Athens, of Thebes, and of Palmyra, are only ruins; yet, what ruins! He is not a man who can look on them with indifference. Find the human body deformed, defiled, defaced; yet there is in it what angels revere. And yet there is to human apprehension an infinite chasm between the body and the spirit that inhabits it. See you yonder



planet called Saturn, girded and guarded with his mighty zone of light; you are struck with awe at his massive grandeur, his glorious light, his kingly gait amid the luminaries of heaven. And yet he but waits in lowly ministry on this poor soul of man. Science is grand in its explorations, its achievements, its spoils. But when they are all accomplished, they are laid at the feet of this viceroy of the Eternal. History is sublime in its profound and comprehensive view; and yet it is only the record of man, and of God's going forth with man. Holy angels come down in chariots of fire; but it is not to despise or overlook, not to rule nor to exact homage from man. It is only to minister to the heirs of salvation. They come in mighty troops that make the welkin tremble at their tread; but it is only to encamp around the little ones that fear the Lord.

Now the object of that divine compassion, on which some men look with indifference, and others with contempt, is man in ruins. The silver is lost, the sheep is wandering, the prodigal is perishing. This, we affirm, is the most momentous reality on earth; the most worthy of man's attention. And no inquiry should be more earnestly pressed by the children of men than this: how does God regard fallen man? The human body is the prey of disease, the victim of death, the captive of the sepulchre and all its horrid ministry of corruption and darkness; the human soul is the slave of Satan, the theatre of anarchy and rebellion, the victim of sin, the sepulchre of love and hope for ever! Yes, man in the pride of his wealth is but tampering with the diseases that hasten his loathsome putrefaction; man, in the glory of his power is but a boasting lunatic, who clanks his chains and fancies they are a sceptre.



Man, in the pride of his researches and attainments is overlooking himself, his misery, his guilt, his hastening ruin. But God has compassion on him, and has come to save him. Amid all the operations of the Deity, we then know none so worthy of our admiration as the manifestation of his compassion for man as apostate and ruined. No matter in what form exhibited, or where contemplated, that compassion should inspire the most eager desire to behold and study it. “Herein is *love*; not that we love God, but that he loved us.” To see Deity at all is a privilege of the most exalted kind. But to be permitted to see the actual movements of divine compassion toward fallen man, in an instance before our very eyes, this is a privilege to be prized above all worldly good and honor.

But it claims more than mere attention. The Gospel should be regarded with the profoundest reverence; for, it shows the awful conflict between light and darkness; good and evil; heaven and hell! whose battle ground is your heart and mine. They have no other in the universe than the human heart. Though it be that of the poor publican whom you and your fellow Pharisees hold in such contempt, there is a sight to be gazed upon with the most profound awe and reverence. That poor man is beginning to feel the galling chain of Satan, and longs to burst it asunder. He flies to the Son of God. And now, it is no longer what merely meets the eye,—a poor ignorant man becoming religious, and calling forth the sneers of Scribes and Pharisees; it is the Son of the Highest combating the Prince of Darkness; and the prize for which they contend is the soul of man!

And as you follow the process through its several



stages, and behold the divine condescension, the sacrifices and sorrows to which the Son of God must submit, in order to accomplish this rescue, you find ample occasion to wrap your mantle about your face and tremblingly adore. The poor shepherd seeking his sheep shall be to you an emblem of divine tenderness; the humble cottager searching for her silver with such diligence and painstaking—of the divine earnestness. And looking on either, your soul must be filled with reverence. Nay, more—with gratitude and sympathy. The sheep is an animal easily bewildered, fatigued, affrighted and vanquished. If it wanders, it must be brought back by the shepherd's care. He must care for it, go for it, take it, and bear it back to its fold, and there defend and nourish it. What an emblem of man as liable to sin, as helpless when he has wandered from God! Want, peril, helplessness; this is the true picture of man's spiritual condition as divine compassion beholds him, and comes to his rescue. Sin is a wandering from God; when we begin, we go on without return, we go on to ruin without the possibility of self-recovery. Sin is the perversion of all our natural powers, and the derangement of all our natural relations to God and the universe. Self has become the idol of our being; in self, for self, and by self we attempt to live. Oh! how deplorable, how fearful; and that we should gild it over with fair names and fair seemings, and a perpetual smile! There is not an attribute in God to plead for us but Compassion. Justice is armed for our destruction. "Let him alone; he is joined to idols" is its natural, stern, but righteous decision. And now our Creator has loved us in this miserable state. Jesus is the good Shepherd; and it



is on his feelings and his sacrifices, his labors and his success, that we are called to look with sympathy and gratitude ; for this ruin is our common lot. You cannot select out any, however degraded, and say—they needed this, but we do not. Nor can you, on the other hand say—this is for us, and not for them.

But this is merely a partial view of the subject, to look on man as ruined by sin, and on the divine compassion moved by the sight of this ruin. Divine love went infinitely beyond mere feeling. It came forth in acts of infinite kindness and condescension. We therefore notice that,

2. *God's desire, purpose, and efforts to save men are holy, just, and good.* Now we contemplate the positive side of the subject, God's compassion coming forth to deliver him from deserved and coming destruction, and also to bring him to the likeness of God, the presence of God, and the society of God for ever.

*Fallen man can be raised so high.* This is abundantly set forth in the Scriptures. Regenerated men are called sons of God ; said to have been re-created in the likeness of Christ. The Father and the Son come and dwell with them. The Holy Spirit makes their bodies and spirits temples. They will be taken to behold him without an obscuring veil ; to be with him for ever. This was true of Abraham, of Manasseh, of the penitent woman, the dying thief, and some of the murderers of Christ. It is true, we believe, of many of the paricidal and cannibal savages of the Pacific Ocean ; of the profane Bunyan ; of the profligate Colonel Gardiner and Earl of Rochester.

This is glorious as an achievement ; to see them washed from their sins, clothed in the righteousness of



God, raised to the society of heaven, and dwelling in light for ever as the sons of light. And *the mode of it is excellent and glorious*. It injures no right or principle. Men have thought they were wise in asking whether God appeased himself by an atonement. But could they not see that the guardian of rights and sacred interests may do something in reference to a principle? A sovereign may extend clemency to criminals; but be very careful that the mode of doing it shall express his approbation of law and government, and reveal the sterner attributes of his nature, while he is giving scope to the gentler. This Jehovah has fully done in his method of saving sinners. And the wiser men grow, the more fully will they discover the deep and holy meaning of the cross; and that Christ "ought to suffer these things," if man is to be saved. All Pharisees want mere law to prevail. Thinking they can stand by law, they are unwilling to see Mercy come in and lay her broad plans, take this world under her governance, erect the cross, and then invite publicans and sinners to come and be saved on the same terms as Pharisees and Scribes. Christ never invited the wicked to come to him, that their vices and follies might be sanctioned; but because he loved them, and would save them from their sins.

This way of recovery then gives scope to God's most amiable attributes, throws a bright beam of hope over the miserable path of man struggling and staggering to the grave.

This way of recovery is to bring a revenue of glory to the Most High, while it enhances immeasurably the blessedness of the universe.

Nor could the salvation of a sinner, whether publi-



can or Pharisee, be accomplished in any other way. There is no waste of power, no vain parade of sympathy, no extravagant utterance of feeling, no needless suffering; Christ is the good Shepherd who misses the sheep from his fold, seeks it as he did Matthew, the Samaritan woman, and Saul of Tarsus; finds it, bears it on his shoulder, and brings it, rejoicing, to his fold.

The vindication of God's mercy against Saducean indifference and Pharisaic contempt, is then not only an appeal to the human heart, but also to the moral judgment of the universe, and to all its better feelings.

Looked at in itself, how base is man's indifference to God's merciful intentions! We are in a common condemnation and ruin. Whether then it is in reference to our fellow-men or ourselves, can any thing be more unworthy of our manhood than a cold indifference? We deem it noble to be stirred with patriotic zeal for our country's good. We deem it noble in Howard to visit all the prisons of Europe, that he might alleviate the misery of their wretched inmates. We follow with intense sympathy the successive steps of some suffering hero in a purely fictitious tale; but when we come to the contemplation of the moral degradation of an entire race, nay, of their endless ruin, a strange stupidity comes over us! Oh! this fact is enough to make the world serious; this fact is enough to abase man's self-conceit, and show him that something is fearfully out of order in his mental frame.

But when to this we add the interest felt by other beings, then its horribleness appears more vividly. God and angels are happy without us; happy, if we persevere in rebellion, and die. Yet they look upon our



state, not with complacency but with pity, intense pity. And not only are they disinterested parties, but they are so exalted. God and his angels looking with intensest interest upon man's religious feelings, and his action in reference to the salvation of his soul; but man himself indifferent!

Nay, more,—while God is smiling in paternal delight over the return of the prodigal son, his elder brother in the Pharisaic pride of his heart, looks on with contempt and hatred. This is the climax of human wickedness. God has come, in the person of his Son, to save a lost soul. The Good Shepherd has found the lost sheep, and is bringing it home upon his shoulders with joy;—all heaven is moved with joy, that the wanderer has been found and is restored. But the Pharisee sits there smiling at the absurdity of the whole movement! This is about the feeling of many in our days when they hear of a revival of religion, of the conversion of a sinner. These parables were designed to reveal them to themselves.

The religion of Christ is the religion for sinners who would escape from sin. And what have reasonable men of the world to say in defence of their own indifference or contempt toward this most momentous of all events in human life; the return of a wandering soul to Christ, its “Shepherd and Bishop?” Are they wiser and better than the angels; is their mirth and joy more rational, more dignified, more worthy of intelligent beings than this joy of angels and saints?

Come, fellow-men, let us reason together. What have you to say? “There is so much fanaticism in the world.” That is true. But counterfeit money does not destroy the value of that which is genuine. There are



fanatical admirers of nature ; but it does not justify you in contempt for her real beauties. I grant that the existence of pretended conversions and spurious revivals justifies every one in exercising caution ; but not, indifference or contempt. Have you never rejoiced with the angels of God over one conversion ? Then is it because there never has been one in your day ? Or, is it not that you are not with the angels and the God of mercy, but with the Pharisees ? Perhaps you say : “ There is so much uncertainty about their persevering.” Alas ! is that your uniform rule of action ? Then you are leading a sad life ; you never rejoiced at the birth of a child, for it might not live long ; you never rejoiced at its first sweet lisplings, because it might by and by learn to speak unkind words ; you never rejoiced in its bright beaming countenance, because it might die that very day ; you never were made glad by its success in study, because it might never put that knowledge to good account. Now, I can conceive of a man acting on this principle ; but I never heard of one that did. And until I do, I shall think you have not rendered the true reason for your indifference or contempt for the various exercises of God’s renewing grace toward sinful man.

Here is great encouragement for all who are conscious of apostasy from God, to return. Their main difficulty, after the sincerely formed purpose to return to him, is, the doubt about his sympathy. How can they approach that awful presence, and ask for forgiveness and a restoration of the divine favor, if they have no assurance that his own kindness will plead their cause ? They cannot stand before his frown.



Then what more could they ask than these parables? It is not merely that God may possibly permit them to approach, which was all the encouragement Esther had in approaching her sovereign. But he has taken the first steps towards them. He has a father's heart, a shepherd's heart. They are precious to him, though lost at present. They are precious as the lost sheep, the lost silver, the lost son. And if they will return, not only will they be welcome, but there will be in their Father's house the peculiar joy which is occasioned by the recovery of any thing lost. Try to understand this joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Regard not the indifference, the frowns or the contempt of Pharisaic sinners. A lost dog would cause its owner sadness; a lost child greater sadness; and a recovered child fills a neighborhood with joy.



## LECTURE IV.

### THE TRUE VINE; OR, A LIVING FAITH UNITES TO CHRIST.

JOHN XV. 1-6. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned."

THERE are two kinds of connection between the branches and the vine. The one is visible and superficial; the other is invisible and vital. The Saviour furnishes under this symbolical fact very important instruction concerning a pretended union, and a real connection with him by faith. The visible part of a real and a false union with him is membership in the Church; be it the truest and the purest of all that claim to be churches of Christ. And concerning mere membership in the Church, without faith in him, he gives both a rule for determining its existence and a prediction of its consequences. It may be known by that fact that it is fruitless. Like the bark of a branch



that has no vital connection with the sap-vessels of the trunk, and yet appears to belong to it, so a profession of piety puts us in the Church; but something else is needed to our being found in Christ. And as the branch so situated cannot bring forth fruit, so the unbelieving member of the Church may be known by his unfruitfulness in religion. And the destiny of that person is an ultimate separation, even externally from Christ, and a ruin as complete as that of a dead branch that is cast into the fire.

But there is likewise a vital union with Christ; and on that our Lord here chiefly remarks. We shall now contemplate its nature and its history.

#### I. THE NATURE OF THE UNION BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE SOUL THAT TRUSTS ALONE IN HIM.

It is a vital union; and, on our part, an intimate dependence mutually recognized. What in nature is more vital and intimate than the connection of a branch with its vine? In grace it is still more intimate and more enduring. We notice then in this spiritual union these qualities to be prominent: it is intimate, invaluable, and enduring.

1. *It is an intimate union.* Think of the connection of a branch with its vine. The fibres of the one are almost identical with those of the other; their sap-vessels are so perfectly adapted to each other, and so adjusted, that the communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the trunk, is unobstructed and constant. The root takes strong hold of the earth, and draws nourishment from it, to be poured through the entire length, and to the smallest extremity of the branch. Such is the believer's relation to Christ. He



calls the Church his body ; himself its head ; a nation, of which he is the King ; a wife, whose husband he is ; a family, of which he is the father ; a flock, of which he is the shepherd. In the 8th Psalm, man is spoken of as made inferior to the angels, and yet over all other terrestrial beings. In the epistle to the Hebrews, that passage is quoted, without doing it any violence, as referring to Christ. He is bone of our bone ; and thus, allied to the race. But it is not this that secures the spiritual union here referred to. His incarnation gave him a peculiar natural relation to the human race. But this spiritual relation is not established in any individual case, except by the exercise of personal faith. Neither human birth, nor Jewish birth, nor visible connection with the Church, avails without personal faith ; that faith which includes on our part supreme preference, profoundest reliance, entire consecration ; which secures a complete identification of feelings, desires, interests and honor ; a communion most earnest and intimate, a constant interchange of feelings, a constant imparting and receiving of grace from him, and gratitude from us. There is nowhere else communion like this. And with this intimacy of connection and communion there is also a moral identification before God and the universe. These are some of its effects ; our sins are reckoned to him, his righteousness is imputed to us ; as we see in the declaration—"he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Our praying is accepted through him ; our persons are so viewed in connection with him, that we are said to be "accepted in the beloved." If any one injures a believer, he wounds Christ ; if he gives him a cup of cold water,



Christ considers it given to himself. We enter into his rights, his victories, and the glorious results of his redemptive acts. The law is for us answered by his obedience and suffering. Satan is conquered, the world is conquered, death is conquered, heaven is claimed by him for us.

In view of this statement, which is but the condensation of a hundred declarations of the Scriptures, it is easy to see that,

2. *This is a most important union for us.* It will be remembered that Jesus gave this beautiful emblem of his relations to believers, just as he was about to take leave of his beloved disciples. The topic of his address was—the tender and permanent bond that united them to him; permanent, even when his body should be no longer upon the earth. And to impress it deeply on their minds, he gives them the vine for ever to be its most instructive and graceful emblem. And I cannot omit remarking, by the way, that no higher proof of his claiming to be God can be given than his using this emblem under such circumstances. The Jews had always been taught to regard God himself as their only dependence. A curse was pronounced upon him who should trust an “arm of flesh.” And yet the Son of Mary here leads them to regard him as the very fountain of their spiritual life. The grape vine was one of the most important objects of agricultural interest to the Jews. It grew in Palestine to an enormous size, and was very productive. They accordingly considered sitting under their own vine as a choice emblem of God’s kind protection. Herod availed himself of this sentiment in the construction of the third temple. He caused a richly carved vine



to be placed as an ornamental border around and over one of the magnificent gates leading into the temple. The Jews always regarded the vine as the most noble of plants, and a type of all that was excellent, powerful, fruitful, and fortunate. "The vine," our Lord seems to say, "which you so much esteem, is but a symbol, a shadow. I am the reality; I am the true vine. Do not imagine that the heavenly is patterned after the earthly; the earthly was made to illustrate the heavenly; all earthly things are religious parables to him who has their key. As a nation you prize the vine; as sinners, so should you prize me above all other beings; for, as the branch cannot live separated from the vine, no more can ye live unless ye abide most intimately and vitally in me."

This is not then a Jewish truth, but a universal truth, in which we have as deep an interest as John and James and Peter.

In the apostasy man severed himself from God. That separation is wide and fearful, to an extent which nothing shows us so clearly as the wonderful provision God has made to re-establish that union, that his tabernacle may indeed be with man, and we in Him, and He in us. Once His sacred temple was in the human heart. On the altar of its affections burned the pure fire of holy love. From around it, arose the incense of praise; which the tongue, the glorious priest uplifted toward the throne of his glory. Within the walls of this immortal temple the manifested Deity shed its mild glory; and the Creator communed with his creature.

Does it not make you sad to go around the ruins of some noble palace, and reflect on the glory and royalty which once dwelt there; on the noble spirits whose



power once swayed the sceptre of empires ; the brilliant minds that once around the throne outshone the brightness of the very jewels of the crown ? But now, a rude mass of stones alone remains, and silence has stretched in undisputed sway, her leaden sceptre over the spot where the power and energy of an empire were once concentrated. It is sad. But oh ! it is a sadder sight to see this temple in ruins ; this palace deserted of its king ! Once, God reigned in man, communed with man. Man was made for that ; and his state is most unnatural, until he is restored to that.

Christ has come to re-establish that communion ; to repair this desolate temple ; to rekindle those extinguished fires ; to consecrate and purify by bloody sacrifices, the once polluted habitation of pride and selfishness. “In him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And of his fulness have we received ; and grace for grace.” We receive from him Life. If there is any life in the vine, the healthy branch will partake of it ; the same in kind and degree. “He that hath the Son, hath life.” “If any man eat me, even he shall live by me.” “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” All men have a vegetable, an animal, and a rational life. Only the soul united thus to Christ has spiritual life. He has the fourfold vitality of justification ; sanctification ; victory over sorrow, pain and death ; eternal life, or blessedness in heaven.

And not only is this life once given, it is for ever preserved and secured to the believer. “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

See then the inventory of blessings which this connection produces. We live before the law ; before an



enlightened conscience ; before a righteous Judge, who pronounces us guilty, but forgiven. We live in sweet communion with our Maker and Saviour, and with all his saints. We live upon the Truth that has nourished all who have entered into heaven. We have the Spirit of Christ ; the spirit of adoption ; of prayer, of praise. We thus bring forth the fruits of righteousness and beneficence ; the fruits that honor God, and bless men. The human nature of Christ was as really inadequate of itself to do the work of redemption, as we are. But he, as a man, had the Spirit without measure, to fit him for his work. That Spirit becomes equally the strength of every one united to Christ by faith. The power of evil is so identified with human nature, that no man can overcome it but by union with Christ. His Father is the vine-dresser. He skilfully and kindly prunes every fruit-bearing branch. Then our afflictions are the pruning-knife ; and turn to the best account. We share Christ's sufferings and reproach now, and shall share his glory hereafter. He is not now, and never will be, "ashamed to call them brethren." His angels now minister to us. He now reigns, in our nature and for us, on heaven's throne. His second appearing will be, as the Son of Man. He will own and welcome believers in the day of his triumph and coronation. We shall go in with him, and reign with him for ever !

There surely is no alliance comparable to this !  
And while it is so blessed, it is,

3. *An enduring alliance* ; the only one formed in this world. It is indissoluble. The permanence of our faith is indeed an indispensable *condition* of the permanence of this union ; and yet, great is the mystery of godliness ; when we believe, we have an infinitely more



secure *ground* of hope, of constancy, than our own constancy itself. This is a union for eternity. All other unions must perish ; however honorable, precious, or important. Now we look at,

## II. THE HISTORY OF THIS MYSTERIOUS UNION.

1. *The design and the preparatory work are altogether his.* Its origin is in his love to us. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” It is a deep mystery that this human race should have departed from God ; and, that all harmonious relations should have been either totally dissolved, or in process of dissolution. It seems difficult to make men realize this truth. But, it is true, and one of the greatest truths. Man has voluntarily departed from God ; and, the Son of God has voluntarily come to restore us to union, and to secure that union beyond any future invasion.

To effect this end, all the mechanism of the world, and all the powers of Providence have been in operation. From him proceeds the promised Spirit, who promotes and completes it. He constructs all the material world, all social life, with reference to this end. He sends his Word, and his messengers to utter it ; by which the conscience is enlightened, and awakened, the sense of spiritual want is awakened, and the soul led to Christ. And we should not contemplate this work of divine mercy, without recalling what it costs him who executed it.

Condescension, sacrifice and effort, have prepared the way of our reconciliation with God. His only begotten Son has showed from the beginning a deep in-



terest in our race ; appearing often of old, in various visible forms to his people. But he at length became incarnate. The Lord of glory must become man, and fully unite himself with human nature, that fallen man may be re-united to God. No other hand can lay hold upon man, to lift him up. Other eyes may have looked with pity on his wretched estate ; but in vain. And he could not save us but by becoming one of us. This was typified of old in the Goël, or Redeemer. He must be the “next of kin” to the redeemed. And to that the Son of the Highest condescended.

In a previous parable he had compared himself to the shepherd. But here he advances far beyond that. The shepherd is not of the nature nor rank of his flock ; but the vine is identical with its branches, in structure and in life.

2. *This union becomes personal, then, by our own voluntary action.* The coming of the Son of God into our world was the greatest event of time. Next to it to each of us personally, is our own act of entering into personal union with him, by faith. Thus is both the formation of this relation and its continuance voluntary, on both sides. Christ chooses us, and we choose him. But it is not effected without cost on our part. It is, generally, the most difficult act in a human life, in some stage of it. It is a holy union with a holy person, to a holy end, by a wicked being. It is a union of utter dependence, to be entered into by a proud being. Sometimes the struggle begins with the recognition of our need of such an atonement, such a change of heart ; sometimes, with renouncing our own will, or our chosen objects of affection and pursuit. The struggle is with outward and with internal obstacles. There is a pain-



ful work of detachment, and an equally difficult work of attachment!

And it may be added, that after the union is formed, its preservation and its effectiveness depend on much painstaking on his part, and on ours. He must exercise much forbearance and much skill in preserving us. We must watch and pray, meditate, struggle, resist, labor and conquer, by courage, by faith, by toil. "Abide in me," is the requirement; and it involves much and incessant earnestness.

The bond that unites one believer to another is then the most vital, noble and enduring of any on earth. We "are one in Christ;" all of us are branches, and only branches. Some glory in belonging to a particular church. If they mean by that, belonging to Christ, they state the case awkwardly. What is the Church? It is the mass of branches. But one branch does not live on another as its source of life. It lives on the trunk and root. It is not belonging to any particular church that will continue after death; it is our personal union with Christ. So it may be said of any other, the most honorable and agreeable relation of life. It is not in itself so noble, or so ennobling; and it cannot be so enduring as union with Christ.

We find, then, in this parable, a rebuke to the sectarian spirit. The sectarian spirit is not zeal for truth, nor attachment to the Gospel, nor peculiar interest in one's own section of the Church, as many seem to consider it. But it is a magnifying something above Christ; and regarding something as more important than union with him. Nothing else is so important.



And hence, if we have evidence that another person believes in Christ “with the heart,” no matter in what ecclesiastical connection he is, he is a brother. We may disagree with many of his views; may find it necessary to contradict and refute them. But we must love him, and rejoice in him as a living branch. Our church may be located on the south side of the trellis-work, and so be better situated for growth and fruitfulness than his; yet he on the north side is equally a branch, growing on the same trunk, sustained by the same life as we.

We must live by faith. That is the meaning of the injunction; “Abide in me.” “The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Merely to know and believe this doctrine of union with Christ, without the constant exercise of faith, hardens and emboldens the heart in disobedience. Our growth, our comfort, and our usefulness, all depend on the degree of faith we have in exercise.

Here is power over the world. What are its honors to one who regards himself as having eternally the glories of the Son of God! What are its pleasures to him who shares the love of God to his Son! What are the contempt and opposition of man to him whom God accepts in Christ! What is worldly wealth to one who is made “heir of God, and joint heir with Jesus Christ!”

Here is power over the heart. Selfishness cannot live where faith in Christ is in exercise, any more than fire and water can occupy the same space at the same time. Self-interest is felt to be out of place when re-



ceiving eternal life as a gift ! Coldness and sluggishness, and cowardice, all shrink from the presence of faith. Can the branch forget the vine ? if it could speak, would it talk of and to every thing else but the vine ?

Here is power to overcome despondency, and doubt, and discouragement. Have you guilt ? You are in Christ ; and he is “made unto us Righteousness.” Have you a wicked heart which overcomes your sincerest, strongest endeavors ? Say ; “in the Lord have I strength—I can do all things through Christ.”

In this subject we have a glimpse of our Redeemer’s glory. A grape vine is a beautiful object ; sometimes with a majestic and towering trunk ; covered with graceful, and strong boughs, hanging full of their drapery of leaves, and their rich clusters every where purpling the dark foliage ! How splendid must have been that artificial vine, one hundred feet high, festooning the temple-gate, and covered with clustering grapes formed of pearls, gold, silver, and precious stones ! But these are not the *True Vine*. Christ is that. All the graces of the Church cluster around him. And so will they be seen for ever in heaven !

Are you in this Vine ? Not, if you are not a sinner ; a great sinner, a condemned sinner ; lost, ruined, helpless ; not, if you are depending on your birth, your wealth, your character among men, your talents, your virtues, your piety, your philanthropy, or any thing but Christ, as the source of your spiritual life ; not if you are resting on your connection with the church ; not if you care for any thing so much as to be delivered from



sin by Christ; not, if you have not distinctly believed in him, as entirely distinct from believing about him; not, if you can live satisfied without prayer, without thoughts of Christ, and words about him, and deeds that honor him, and companions that love him.

But, it is a fearful thing to be “out of Christ.” He himself tells you so. There is to you then no pardon of one sin by your Judge; no well-grounded peace. There is no communion with God, because he says, “No man cometh to the Father, but by me.” There is no real, permanent usefulness; for, he says, “Except ye abide in me, ye can do nothing;” nothing to purpose, nothing that God will acknowledge at your hands. You can have none but the hope that deludes; for, Christ says, “If a man abide not in me, he is *cast forth* as a branch, and is *withered*, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are *burned*.”



## LECTURE V.

### THE LEAVEN; OR, PIETY, INTERNAL AND PROGRESSIVE.

MATT. XIII. 33. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened."

WE have already considered the union of the soul with Christ, produced by faith. We are now led, to contemplate, somewhat in detail, the effects which that union with Christ produces on the character.

There is a resemblance, and yet a difference between this comparison and that of the mustard seed. They both contemplate the power and progress of the Gospel as not recognized by an unbelieving world, yet as mighty; transforming and assimilating both the heart of man and human society to itself. But the mustard seed refers to general and external progress; the leaven, to individual and internal progress.

The points here illustrated are these:—the human heart needs a change to fit it for the service of God and the blessedness of heaven, as really and as completely as the mass of meal requires the change to make it into bread;—the power to produce that great change is foreign to the heart itself; but its transforming operation is internal and invisible; and, finally, it is complete.



Upon the first, the universal necessity of such a change, I will not now discourse. Assuming that as a starting point, I call your attention to the fact that,

I. WHEN THE HUMAN HEART IS RADICALLY AND EFFECTIVELY CHANGED, IT IS BY A FOREIGN POWER.

Our Teacher here reminds us that a woman does not find the leaven in the meal, but brings it to the meal. It is a foreign agent brought to supply a want in the material needing to be changed. It is a momentous inquiry, whether man has in himself all that he needs to secure his own immortal well-being; whether he needs merely to evolve his powers by a careful process, or is dependent upon the power of God, to be exercised in ways entirely out of his ordinary providential care of his creatures.

1. *It will be admitted that the change is not needed, as a literal creation.* I know that the work of the Holy Spirit is called a new creation, a crucifixion, burial and resurrection; a baptism; a divorce from the law, and an espousal to Christ. But there is no question that all these are figurative descriptions of the great fact we have now under consideration. If it were a literal re-creation, then personal identity would be destroyed. But the regenerated man is conscious that he is a new man; not in the sense of being another man, but a radically altered man. There is not a new faculty, but a radical change in the employment of his faculties. At every step of the process he is conscious that it is he himself that is undergoing a change. He has not a new conscience, but the old one awakened. Dormant sensibilities are aroused. New thoughts, new feelings, new purposes occupy the soul; but they are all in his



soul, the very same he always had. This none will deny who believe in the reality of regeneration. But some maintain notions which imply that the change required is such as really to make the man so different as to have lost his identity. The love he now exercises is a new faculty of love, a new faculty of perception, sensibility and will. This view they maintain in order to make man's dependence absolute ; to annihilate in the natural man all ability ; and with it, as we believe, all responsibility. The analogy may not be pressed as a theological argument ; yet it holds strictly true, that it was not the creation of meal, that the leaven should accomplish, but simply its transformation. A believer is not an animal made into a man, but a man morally changed. They who carry the point to this extent, would reply to all this reasoning from the consciousness of the regenerated, that this change takes place before consciousness. And they think they see it taught in the Word. There we must agree to differ ; for argument would perhaps be of little service on this point ; and certainly out of place here. And so I return to a simple affirmation, in order to rid this subject of what I regard a fatal encumbrance to it. The power of God's Spirit is not needed because of any inability which impairs responsibility or culpability. The Holy Spirit as really operates upon what is already in the man by nature, as the leaven operates upon the meal as it is, to make it what is desired. And yet man would no more change himself to become what God desires, than the meal would make itself into sweet bread without the leaven. The change is a change induced by a foreign power.

2. *That power is the Holy Spirit of God.* The



paste which is prepared for bread, is heavy, tough, and altogether unfit for man's food. But the penetrating power of leaven produces an entire change in its qualities, as food. This power over the heart God challenges for himself, and mysteriously limits to the Holy Ghost. I say mysteriously, because we cannot comprehend the distinction which this name implies; we cannot comprehend how God affects the human mind in any respect, much less how the Holy Spirit regenerates it. But the Saviour taught Nicodemus that we must be born of the Spirit; that this is indispensable to salvation. He promised his disciples that the Comforter should come after his ascension. And the first great baptism of the Spirit brought hundreds to a new life of faith and obedience.

Another fact here included is,

3. *The Gospel is the instrument of the Spirit's power.* Some have carried their theorizings so far on this subject, that they affirm with confidence that the Holy Spirit changes the heart, to prepare it for another change by the Truth. The first they call regeneration, the other conversion. I can only say—they have never convinced me that they had Scripture for their guide in this opinion. I see then no such distinction between regeneration and conversion. I see there the Word of God made the great instrument. A heart is said to have been opened to receive the truth. But will any one affirm that that open heart, without any Gospel truth in it, was a regenerated heart? I am reluctant to bring these distinctions which theologians have deemed of supreme importance into this place; they seem to me to be so unprofitable. And yet grave consequences do hang upon them ultimately; and there-



fore something must be said upon them. The sacred writers and our Lord insist upon the truth as contained in the Scriptures being the great instrument of this radical change, from its first to its final stage. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" This expresses the relations of the Truth to the first stage of the change. "Sanctify them through thy Truth: Thy word is Truth," was the prayer of the Redeemer for his disciples, in whom the change was already begun. And when he described the operations of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to repentance and faith, he showed that the Truth is the instrument of his power. Thus he speaks: "And when the Comforter is come, he will convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father." Yet all these points to be brought home to the soul with resistless and heart-changing demonstration, are facts contained in the Gospel.

The leaven has a kind of vital energy, penetrating and powerful, imparting new qualities to the meal in which it has been placed. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The word of the Lord is quick and powerful; sharper than any two-edged sword."

The truths of the Scriptures are the most weighty, impressive and transforming of which the human mind can conceive. The difficulty which hinders their immediate efficacy in the case of every one who hears



them, is called in the Scriptures, unbelief. It is an opposite state of purpose, inclination and affection, which keeps the mind from so admitting the realities they describe, as to give them their legitimate sway over the mind, heart, and will. The unregenerate man has no fear about his future condition. But just imagine him to admit the Word of God as true to his mind. He then discovers that God is angry with him ; that sin is a mortal disease in him ; that the judgment-day is hastening ; that all his life has been sin ; and all his prospect is fearful. But unbelief neutralizes all these truths ; it is the work of the Holy Spirit to overcome this neutralizing power. He brings these truths home efficiently to the heart. And if you shrink from the first effects of these truths, because they seem to make you worse, as they really affect you uncomfortably, remember that the leaven, though unpalatable, produces our most palatable and nutritious food. Man has not then an innate, self-transforming power. Where was, for instance, in former days the recuperative power of Greece when Christ entered the world, of Rome, of Jerusalem, of human nature ? And where is now the self-recovering power of any state or country in which this Word is not now operating ; of India, Africa, China, or the Indian tribes of America ! Christ says : it is his Gospel employed by his Spirit.

We now pass from the agents of this power, to notice that in this parable.

II. THEIR OPERATION IS SHOWN TO BE PERSONAL, INVISIBLE, AND RADICAL.

Such is the operation of leaven. It affects specifically one definite mass, invisibly and thoroughly. The change that Christ came to produce



1. *Is a change of individuals.* It is intensely interesting to examine the character of all political and religious institutions existing in our Saviour's day, and see how clearly he discerned the point in which they were radically defective; in which most of the civil governments to this day are defective; and even the most numerous and powerful sects in religion, or churches. Greece, Babylon, Rome, and nearly all the modern European governments, made the country every thing; the man, nothing. So it is with Paganism, Mohammedism, Romanism. But Christ sunk every thing in the individual man. And out of his religious teachings has slowly risen the British Constitution, which makes the citizen the end, and government and society the means, to a great extent; and our Constitution, freed from the burdens of past ages, which carries this principle still farther. The Gospel deals with man apart from all associations, institutions, and alliances, as a man; a single solitary spirit, who carries in himself more worth than worlds can buy, more to lose or save than an angel can ever compute. He may have many duties to perform toward others; many claims of others may lie upon him. Society may be to him a very important institution. But changes in heaven or hell, revolutions in the whole heavenly sphere, changes in church or in state, are all to him nothing compared to one change,—that of himself. "One thing is needful—except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is that to thee? follow *thou* me."

2. *It is an internal change.* The leaven affects the exterior layer of the meal; but it is by working outward from within. Man may change many things



externally, before conversion to God. He must change many things in conversion. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord." But the great change is in the heart. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. Burnt-offerings and sacrifices thou wouldst not; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." God recognizes man in his heart; and hence, to know man, he does not look upon the outward appearance, but "he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." If a man is holding to a false religion, let him abandon it; to an irreligious or immoral practice, let him abandon it. But let it be in consequence of an inward forsaking of all sin, and turning to God. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven hid."

3. *It is a radical change.* The leaven takes hold upon the mass of meal at its centre, and works into every atom, until it has essentially changed the properties of the entire body; so radical and thorough is the work of the Holy Spirit. He may in some cases give much light without changing the heart. But the mere acquisition of knowledge is not the great change; for, "though I have all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing." It is not a mere emotional change, for there are principles back of the emotions which will ultimately control them in spite of any temporary influence that may affect them. It is not any endowment of gifts; for, "though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass." It is a change of masters. The authority of Christ now becomes predominant. This introduces new objects of pursuit, new principles of action, new rules of life, a new standard of character and conduct.



So that what had been most cherished is renounced ; what had satisfied, now causes sorrow ; the soul and its power, the body, the being, is devoted to him who hath purchased it by redeeming blood. The dependence of the soul is now upon Christ. For acceptance with the Father, for strength, for light, for life, for victory, for heaven, for success, for support, the soul looks without ceasing to him who hath given his promise, to be its strength and its salvation.

Here then is a change of view in regard to God, self, happiness, the Gospel, time, the world, and eternity. There are new feelings in prayer, in prosperity and adversity ; new desires, new hopes ; gratitude, penitence, zeal for God's honor ; love to his people and his service take the place of world and self. There is a radical revolution in the great controlling faculty, or rather in the man himself ; for he is said, in the strong language of inspiration, to be "a new creature."

Another feature of this change is,

### III. ITS ULTIMATE COMPLETENESS.

Leaven, we have observed, is a chemical agent, working toward one end, the entire assimilation of the mass to a new type. So the Spirit and Word of God penetrating a human being, the Fathers said, "in his spirit, soul, and body," represented by *three* measures of meal, totally transform him.

1. *The tendency of the Word and Spirit of God in the human heart is invariably to one end.* It seems probable that the only reason why the third person in the adorable Godhead is denominated by the title of the Holy Spirit, is not that any distinctive feature of his personality may be pointed out ; but solely with



reference to his office. He is the sanctifier of spirits. All his approaches to our hearts, all his blessed agency within them, is for our renovation ; to illuminate, purify, elevate, and transform them into his own likeness. He finds in us the spirit of the world ; selfishness, pride, and rebellion against God. To recall us to love and obedience ; to subdue our evil habits, and lead us into the service of God, to detach our hearts from earth, and prepare us for heaven ; this is his aim in all his operations. And coincident with this, is the influence of the Word. The Scriptures aim at this great change in us. They affirm its necessity, and they furnish the means of its accomplishment. But,

2. *Their influence may be hindered.* In one sense Truth is omnipotent. But not in opposition to human will. There is the turning-point of freedom and responsibility. Man can resist truth ; refuse to give his attention ; fix his thoughts on a false show : and yield himself to illusion. The Spirit of God is omnipotent. But he does not crush the human soul, nor suspend its powers. Even after he has commenced its renewal, he leaves it a vast space of freedom. And there comes the occasion for that slow progress and imperfect development of the divine life, for which the world censures regenerated men ; and for which they afflict themselves. Some contend for the abstract possibility of advance without any cessation or declension. The difficult point to attain is, to insist on the possibility and obligation of incessant progress, and yet not contradict the realities of experience, nor discourage the sincere who find the difficulties of the way. This blessed work can be hindered by influences without and within. But,



3. *Grace and Truth are ultimately triumphant.*—This point divides the opinions of Christians. Some think they have Scripture and reason for affirming that regeneration does not insure salvation. Their Scriptural proof consists chiefly of the warnings addressed to regenerated persons. But concerning the strongest of these, it is remarkable that it overthrows a part of the theory which these brethren find it necessary to adopt. They dare not affirm that an apostacy after regeneration prevents a second regeneration. On the contrary, they maintain that men are at one time renewed in heart; and afterward, that work is wholly destroyed; so that a regenerated man may become an heir of perdition; and then be converted again, a thousand times. But the Scriptures, speaking of some who have made much religious progress, says, they “have been enlightened, have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, have tasted of the heavenly gift, and are made partakers of the Holy Ghost.” Now this is a strong description. And I do not wonder that some suppose it means regeneration; although I believe it simply describes a great degree of illumination and of religious impression, without regeneration. But if it describes regeneration, then they must take all that follows. If such fall away, “it is *impossible* to renew them to repentance.”

The true state of the case seems to be this. The Scriptures give doctrines with reference to practical results; not to satisfy curiosity, or the mere love of knowledge. And many doctrines are presented partially, and even with seeming contradictions, for these very sufficient reasons; we are unable to go far enough to see the full harmony of them; yet we need to see the



apparent discord, for the sake of its antagonistic influence on the mind. When the Arminian and Calvinistic schools cease contending for victory, and simply desire to know what is taught; whether they can reduce it to a science and a system or not, then I believe they will see in the Scriptures, that a man who is regenerated has the double influence of hope and fear; hope, from the fact that "God will complete what he has begun;" fear, that he may have carried the soul no farther than to that state from which one may fall to rise no more.

*This Parable then repeats to men the solemn affirmation of Christ:—"Ye must be born again."* It shows that between man and heaven lies a barrier which nothing can remove, that does not radically and completely change his heart. The revolutions of time, the advance of science, the progress of civilization; all will be to him unavailing, unless he himself is changed in heart. The parable represents his heart as the unleavened paste, unfit for the Master's use until the Word and Spirit of God have penetrated and transformed it. Your excellent and amiable qualities will not save you. There is back of them an element of ungodliness and selfishness which must for ever exclude you from the kingdom of heaven; for that kingdom is, in every instance of its establishment in the human heart, "like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal."

Here, fellow-men, is the matter of supreme moment to you. You cannot go to heaven, unless the mighty fermentation of Christ's gospel has removed the old ele-



ments of selfishness and ungodliness, and changed you from glory to glory, into the likeness of Christ.

What is it to you personally, to you as an inhabitant of eternity, that science is making the most brilliant conquests ; that liberty is gaining the earth to herself ; that slavery must ultimately cease ; that your political party gets the reins of government into its hands ; that your country becomes the admiration of the world ; nay, if you yourself should become possessor of the world, and yet the Word and Spirit of Christ do not take full possession of your heart ! “What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul !” “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, for one thing is needful.” Men must beware lest they overlook the great principles contained in this parable. Each one must take care, first of his own soul. We easily lose ourselves in a crowd, and satisfy ourselves with sweeping along on this great current of social progress and social happiness. But our first work is with our heart. That must be converted and sanctified, or we have no part in the kingdom of God.

*We see that in extending the Kingdom of God, our work is with individuals.* The kingdom of heaven seeks its first lodgment in the heart. Therefore we must work in that direction, if we would work for its advancement. Whether we have a child to deal with, or an adult, there is the measure of meal, into which the leaven must be introduced. If we are in a vast community, and asking, what good can I do here ? the answer is in this parable ; get the leaven into one heart. If you were landed in China, and could learn only words enough to express the fundamental facts of the



gospel, your labor would be, not with the millions of that vast nation, but with its units. One soul at a time must be reached. And no painstaking, no sacrifice is too great, which it may cost you. The power to transform the heart is not yours. But you have a manifold agency in introducing it. Even the Holy Spirit of God places himself, in a certain degree, within your power. Prayer brings his presence not only to the heart of him that prays; but also to the souls of others. After our Lord's ascension, the first thing the disciples did, was to assemble themselves for prayer, for days. Then the Spirit came with mighty power, into hundreds, changing them into the likeness of Christ.

And the truth is in our own hands. By various channels we can communicate it; not knowing when we sow the seed, which will prosper; but commending it to the Lord of the harvest.

*Our expectations in regard to the progress of Christ's kingdom must be controlled by this Parable.* We must never be discouraged in our labors, by appearances. We send missionaries to a heathen land, or to a church sunk in the death of superstition. Our first success is not outward and visible. We look not for great social and political, or ecclesiastical changes. The leaven has been deposited silently in individual hearts; and there it is working amid great hindrances, often long before its fermentation comes to the surface. Christ filled Judea with the gospel; but it was working silently in thousands who did not manifest its power in them, until long after his death.

Our duty is not with results, but with these forms



of agency. Are we showing the truth of the gospel in our daily intercourse with men ; is our “ conversation with grace seasoned with salt ? ” Do we insinuate the leaven by its outworkings in our lives and conversation ? Do we declare in all suitable ways and seasons the soul-transforming truths of the gospel ? Do we propagate this truth to the extent of our ability ? Do we pray for the Holy Spirit ?



## LECTURE VI.

### GROWTH OF THE SEED ; OR, GROWTH IN PIETY.

MARK IV. 26-29. "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

VEGETABLE growth is one of those beautiful and instructive objects which our heavenly Father has placed before us in infinite variety. For, while the Scriptures are Nature's great interpreter, Nature throws back her light on their pages. This parable was designed to show that growth or progress belongs to the Christian character. The parable of the sower had introduced the subject; showing that the truth penetrates some hearts, as the seed enters the furrow of the ploughed land. There the sower deposits it; and then it must come under new laws and forces, and grow, not only by a power entirely independent of him, but also by processes of which he is quite ignorant. He rises and he lies down, attending to other things; but the seed goes on through its various processes and successive stages, until it has reached its maturity; thus springing up,



and growing, he knows not how. There is in it an indestructible life. The same thing is thus a little differently expressed ; “ being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” The soul of the parable is there ; in the analogy of growth. We must not, therefore, press the other points ; for if you make the sower to be Christ, you fail. He does not sleep, but watches the planted little seed. He is not ignorant how it springs up and grows. If you apply the sower to the preacher, you fail again ; for, although he will reap, yet he does not gather the grain. That belongs to the Lord of the harvest. Nor do I suppose that the allusion to the three stages of growth is absolutely perfect as a classification of Christian experience. It is subordinate in the parable ; yet it is so prominent, and so descriptive of the reality, that it may justly claim to guide our meditations.

We will look at the steps and the means of progress in the divine life. If we were regarding Christian character in the mutual relations of its several parts, we might say that principle or integrity was the soil, faith the root, holy sentiment the blossom, and beneficent action the fruit. But it is rather the chronological order, the diary of the believer which is given in this parable.

I. *The successive stages of progress in Christian experience* are here presented, and the division into three corresponds to John’s beautiful appeals to children, young men and fathers ; not in age, but in spiritual life. First, appears

1. *The blade.* When a good seed falls into good ground, it begins at once to work toward the produc-



tion of the tree that is to bear fruit. It first forms the blade or stem ; which is characterized by vigor and promise, but having yet great tenderness, and great dissimilarity from the expected fruit.

The distinguishing excellencies of this stage are, the simplicity of faith ; the fervor of desire and love ; the earnestness of purpose. To the convert, generally, the attainment appears wonderful, and the prospect most cheering. But there are great defects in connection with these excellencies. They are : ignorance of God, of self, and of the gospel ; a proneness to rest satisfied with comforts, attainments, discoveries and joys, where there should be an earnest pressing forward to greater attainments. It is true, gloriously true, that the pilgrim has just passed the Red Sea. Egypt indeed is behind ; her fetters are riven ; her hosts are destroyed . but Israel is now entering upon the long wilderness-march ; though loved as a child, yet full of the habits formed in the state of bondage, and among that idolatrous people. Next comes,

2. *The ear.* The tree has assumed its shape, put out its branches and leaves, and the fruit has taken form ; though yet lacking ripeness.

This stage of Christian experience is characterized by increasing self-renunciation, as the result of increasing knowledge and experience. There was at first a sincere renunciation of self-righteousness, and of all pretensions to personal wisdom and strength. But it was, as yet, partly theoretic ; sincere, yet consistent with much self-reliance, in unsuspected forms. Now the soul comes to abandon all self-reliance, in every form, because it has painfully discovered that man cannot rely upon himself for any thing spiritually good. This



is accompanied with trust in Christ, more intelligent, more entire, more comprehensive of his attributes and of its own wants. Here the age of conflict commences. Israel stood still on the banks of the sea, and saw his enemies overthrown. But now the desert is entered; and Amalek appears, to dispute his march. Here begins that process, the intention of which the Lord thus explains: "To humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what is in thy heart; to do thee good at thy latter end." The third stage is,

3. *The full corn in the ear.* The full growth of the plant is attained. There only remains to be completed, the process of ripening. You see now exactly what the grain is going to be, and how much of it. Here is a soul passed beyond its fierce conflicts, divested of its worldly habits of thought and feeling; developed in the likeness of Christ; only not perfectly ripe. Humility reigns where pride was once predominant. Submission, meekness, and patience have softened down the rugged features of a nature perhaps impetuous, self-willed, and passionate. Love is calm, but fixed and strong. Hope now illumines every dark spot, and smooths every rugged path in so much of the desert as yet lies this side of the promised land. Life has now become a simpler, sublimer thing; for, it is all turned into converse with God, anticipations of heaven, preparations for heaven, and labors for the kingdom of God on earth. There is less show of strength, than in the young convert; but more real strength; because there is a more absolute self-renunciation, and a more full reliance on Christ. Then we inquire,

II. *What are the mode and means of progress in personal piety?*



1. *It is carried forward by a divine and supernatural agency.* The gospel contains abundantly more than an offer of pardon, and the promise of a continuance of such general divine aid as the soul enjoys before believing. It is the promise of a special assistance of Providence, and of the special aid of the Holy Spirit. "All things work together for good to them that love God." That good is not happiness alone; it is holiness. The Lord Jesus Christ is the God of Providence. He is "Head over all things to the Church." The process of saving the souls for whom he died; of presenting the whole body of the redeemed before the presence of his Father, having no spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, is in his estimation the highest end of all the movements of his providence. This was strikingly exhibited in the history of Israel. "I will give men for thee," saith the Lord, "I have given Egypt for thy ransom; Ethiopia and Seba for thee." You call it a miraculous dispensation. It was a typical dispensation, designed to set forth God's dealings with the true Israel. To carry the soul through its conflicts and labors, from the first act of belief, on to its eternal rest, is an object of supreme interest with him who commissions the angels and guides the stars. And the promise of our ascended Lord is, that he will send the Comforter to complete us in his image; so that as we behold "in a glass the glory of God, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord." Herein the process of growth is hidden from human view; just as it is in nature. No man can see the mighty energy that covers our fields with the tender green blade, the strong fruit-bearing trunk, and the ripening corn. The farmer performs his part, committing the seed to the



earth. The power of growth is in another's hands. He may sleep and rise, night and day, forgetting the humble seed he has sown; but it shall still "spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." I am confident, says Paul to the Philippians, "that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

But this divine agency is not designed to make us inactive in the pursuit of our own highest good. Spiritual progress depends also upon,

2. *Our own external culture.* And here the analogy of nature returns to us. An invisible, inaudible power carries the seed on, from stage to stage of its wonderful growth; but at the same time there is left a place where the skill and power of man can come in, and secure the best results of that powerful divine action. There are appointed means of grace. They consist in such as impart strength from God to the soul, or carry forth the soul in the exercise of its spiritual functions. The truth revealed in the Scriptures is the nourishment of the soul. That truth must be read with so much frequency as to keep its fulness and variety before the mind; its explanation and enforcement must be so heard as to keep the mind continually expanding in its apprehension of it, as to grow in divine knowledge; and so frequently meditated on, as to control the current of thought. Prayer in all its branches greatly aids the unfolding of every part of our spiritual nature. The various modes of Christian conference, especially communion in social prayer, exhortation, and the celebration of Christ's death; together with special acts of solemn self-examination, humiliation, attended with fasting, special acts of private thanksgiving and praise;



and, united to these, the acting out of Christian benevolence in the employment of time, property, and other means of beneficence for the good of our fellow-men; these means, skilfully and faithfully employed, are God's appointed instruments for the promotion of holiness.

There is then a more direct employment of our personal agency, which requires a more specific examination. For distinction's sake, it may be termed,

3. *The inward culture of piety*; and for brevity's sake, reduced to the cultivation of repentance and faith. The will of man is the man in action, the soul in its fullest action; especially in making election of great objects of affection and courses of action. The will, like the memory, is only a mode of action; but it is that on which character, duty, responsibility and destiny supremely rest. Hence the Scriptures continually address man as a being having a will or power of choice toward the right as well as the wrong. But it is as true of the will as of the memory, that it grows weak when not exercised; and the neglect to exercise its higher functions, equally enfeebles them. Now the higher function of the will is the election of a supreme object of affection, a supreme rule of life, and a supreme end of pursuit. And the essence of repentance is in that purpose of the soul by which it turns from all sin to all duty. The will is to be cultivated by right exercise. I will not now specify the mode of its exercise, except to say, that it must be under the guidance of a Scriptural conscience; for at present, my object is simply to insist on its being exercised. Without it there is no such thing as character; as the essence of character lies in the ultimate choices and purposes of



the soul. The very essence of that image of God which man lost in the apostasy, consists of freedom and will rightly used. God is not God without His will fully developed, fully in exercise. Will is the crowning idea of Deity ; will joined to conscience. Will freely choosing, preferring, determining what is morally good, is the perfect conception of a Holy God. There is nothing more indispensable in the inward culture of the divine life, than the culture of the will. It must become strong, prompt, firm, controlling, inflexible, in order to make a healthy, mature Christian. A true Christian is one, who, in all circumstances, chooses the right for himself, for God, for his fellow-creatures ; and who inflexibly adheres to it. This is the sum of all the requirements of the Scriptures. Love is the fulfilling of the law. But love is not a sentiment, a movement of the sensibilities ; it is an exercise of the will, the highest exercise of which it is capable.

This, however, presents only one side of the subject. And if men were left to this instruction, they would fall into a state the very opposite of that meekness, dependence, humility, and submission, which are supreme among the Christian graces ; into self-will, which is the essence of moral deformity. Therefore it should be added, that the will must be cultivated in that exercise of it which the Scriptures call faith. Sin is the enslavement of the will. It cannot follow the dictates of reason and conscience while this fearful power controls it. And the only way of escape from this enthrallment is by believing in the testimony, promise and person of Christ. Faith is the next step in advance of Repentance. Repentance renounces self-interest as a supreme end ; then faith utterly and for ever renounces depend-



ence on self, in reference to spiritual recovery ; and, it accepts the Lord Jesus Christ to be its propitiation, its strength, and its redeemer.

Here then, it is the very opposite of self-reliance, of self-righteousness, of pride, or self-will. This is man's coming back by the very door at which he went out from God. It abandons the suspicion that God is not seeking our welfare ; it abandons the ambitious purpose of rising to places for which He does not prepare us ; it abandons the looking to created good for happiness ; it abandons all independence, and all selfishness, by which God is separated from the soul.

Inward culture may then be concisely described as the constantly renewed exercise of the purpose to forsake all sin, to seek after all holiness, and to rely solely, confidently, and earnestly upon the Almighty Saviour. This earnest seeking after personal perfection, called in the Scriptures, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, leads, as we have seen, to the employment of all God's appointed means, in humble dependence on the grace of God. No garden or field-culture is so sure of success as this heart-culture, since the Lord esteems mental and moral excellence as infinitely more lovely and valuable than the beauty of all material blossoms, or the richest of all material fruits.

And since faith begins and faith continues the life of God in the heart, there is no independence of Christ, from beginning to end. And thus the ripening corn still lives upon the root, to the end.

*Here is encouragement to both the preacher and hearer of the Word.* There is a divine power mightier than human eloquence, mightier than the divine word ;



but acting through human speech, and through the word. There is often in the preacher an enfeebling sense of incompetence to secure the great results at which he aims. But let him remember that, after he has cast in the seed, there is another power to superintend and to secure its growth. To that gracious, sleepless, mighty agent, let him cheerfully and in faith commit the precious trust. He may have other work to do in reference to its growth and maturity. But he is not the mighty power of God. He is permitted and required to pray for the Holy Spirit to accompany and follow his labors; but the power is in the hands of another, not his own. And in every age of the Church the most faithful and successful sowers have magnified the office of the Holy Spirit, and cheerfully intrusted their labors to his grace. Unnumbered supplications have gone up from the servants of God, after preaching the word to their congregations, that the Holy Spirit would give the word root in every heart, and cherish it there as a living seed, growing; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, until the great Reaper shall come and gather it to his garner. This is a delightful resting-place for a soul solicitous of spiritual and eternal results to its labors in the ministry of the word.

And the same encouragement may be found for those who hear the word with the purpose of profiting by it. It is the seed of the kingdom of heaven. Our care and our diligence must be bestowed upon it in the successive stages of its growth. But there is something infinitely better and mightier than our care or diligence. Having received the word into hearts disposed to entertain it and profit by it, we may rejoice that this



growth is effected by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. Our feeble endeavors to retain the memory of it, to apply it to ourselves, to receive from it the greatest benefit, are not unaided efforts. The Holy Spirit is with us, and he makes our efforts avail.

*Here is also responsibility.* This is the seed of the heavenly kingdom, given to the heart of man to take root there, and grow up to eternal life. But what if it fails to grow; some one must bear a heavy load of guilt. It must be some active agency, and a very malignant agency too, that would deprive both God and the soul of such glorious and immortal fruits. It would be very malignant to cast on a field which a farmer had just planted, some poisonous liquor that should kill every seed. Look then at the destruction of this seed in your own, or another's heart. Is it not wicked? Yes, we are made very responsible by receiving this heavenly seed. God requires that we bring forth the fruits of it. I would then propose these questions to different classes successively:

Are you a plant of heaven? Perhaps you reply; I fear not. Why, then? I rejoin. Unbelief is voluntary. You have not received the word in faith; that is, you have wilfully preferred sin to repentance, the world to Christ; and every truth of the Bible you prevent from producing its legitimate effect on you. Consider, beloved hearer, what this involves. God is presenting himself to you in this word. He is here showing you his great clemency, and calling you to return to him. But you obstinately refuse and reject both the terrors and the attractions of the Gospel. It will be bad for you to turn away from hearing the word of God. It is dreadful to hear and refuse obedience.



Perhaps you say—I once thought myself converted ; but it proved to be superficial. Then see your mistake, and avoid it now ; but do not plead a former superficial conversion as a reason why you should not now profoundly turn to the Lord. You may have chosen salvation, and not Christ ; reformation, but not godliness ; godliness, but not by believing on Christ. Now renounce unbelief, self-righteousness and formality, and turn fully to God in Christ. Have you grown out of the earth far enough to resemble the blade ? If so, this is but the beginning,—progress is now your duty. For a plant not to grow is to die. Your growth depends upon a power not your own. But the promise of that power is conditioned on your faithfulness. It may be granted, to make you faithful. But for that there is no promise. Your responsibility respects the promise of the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer ; of a blessing in the right use of appointed means. Some shoot above the ground, and there they remain stationary stems, never growing, never bringing fruit. Some have been in that state for many years. They have no strong desire to be otherwise. They have not renounced all belief that they are Christians. But they have renounced the hope of ever making much out of Christianity, or of it making much of them. They grow in nothing ; they aim at no growth. This is a miserable condition. This is a miserable use to make of the glorious redemption of Christ. It comes to give you life ; to raise you up from earth ; to make you a child of God, an heir of life eternal ; and you are content to get only so much as a poor, leaky hope, that is every moment liable to sink and carry you down with it when a storm shakes the ocean around you.

Arouse thee, arouse thee, dreamer ; this is not thy rest : it is no time for any to slumber. Every day you live in this supine state, you make it doubtful whether you ever were converted, and make it more difficult to disentangle yourself, and start vigorously for the celestial city. Are you grown so far as the corn in the ear ? There is still a work before you. The end is not attained. You have a firmer will, though less emotion than formerly. You dread sin more, but see more evidence of it in yourself. You have grown downward as well as upward. Leaving all other sources of strength, you have taken a stronger hold of Christ. Your character is mellowing into more meekness and gentleness. You can get along better with others ; and they with you. You have less impetuosity than formerly, but more purpose. There begins to be a symmetry in your character, a harmony. None of the fruits of the Spirit are ripe in you yet, but they are all there. It is manifest that the world stands much lower with you than it once did. It is evident that you have found out something about the Bible and prayer that you once did not know. There is a power in your example at home and abroad ; there is a steadiness of Christian zeal that did not formerly exist. The plant has evidently passed the first stage of growth. It is no longer the blade ; the ear is visible, well-formed, complete ; yet not full, nor fully ripe.

Brother, I congratulate you. It is a glorious thing to be growing into the fulness of a tree of Paradise. Yet I also exhort you. The height is not yet reached ; the battle is not over. Still you must “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” You want a more complete crucifixion of



self, a more full knowledge of our infinitely adorable God and Saviour, more intimate communion with him, more ardent love to his cause; more ardent desires for the heavenly state; more intense interest in the salvation of the lost; more of that prayer that shuts and opens heaven.

But perhaps I address one who is ripe for heaven. It may be a disciple youthful in years, matured in godliness. It may be one combining maturity of powers and experience with a matured religious character.

You can look back and see the successive stages of growth, and confirm what has here been said. Your own agency, vigilance, solicitude, struggles, tears, self-denials and diligence, have been all demanded in this work; and yet an unseen power has achieved the blessed results you have now reached. You can see what of natural disposition grace hath changed, and what new forms your character has assumed. Let us bless his name together this day. It is grace; free, wondrous, victorious grace. It is power divine employed by love divine!

When I think of such a case, I am much impressed by this passage in the text—"immediately he putteth in the sickle." "But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." When you look at the earthly side of this, you see the sower, who went forth in tears bearing precious seed, casting it into the cold bosom of the earth. For long months he has waited, watching the clouds and the winds. But now his fears and anxieties are subsiding into a calm delight. The blade has sprung up; then he sees it has not perished in the earth. The ear puts forth; then he rejoices still more.

Now the corn is full in the ear, and fully ripe. With what gladness does he put in the sickle, to gather it home to his garner ! This poor earthly solicitude, followed by this joy, is one of our teachers. It shows us something of our Redeemer's feelings in reference to our growth in holiness. Fellow disciple, no eye has watched your progress, your declensions, your recoveries, your conflicts, your fears, your hopes and your efforts, with such interest as he has felt. And now he sees you *ripe for heaven*. Perhaps a few more suns must shine upon you, a few more rains must fall ; he sees something yet not quite complete ; but the time is near, it hastens, when you will feel the sickle. Fear it not ; you know what hand holds it. It cuts down only the straw. The precious grain is garnered. There may come the sharp-edged sickle, and then the tremendous blow of the flail. That ends your earthly history. The rest dates from heaven. A soul ripened for glory in this field of sin and death ! Surely the joy of the harvest thrills through the heavenly mansions.

O ye sowers ! be diligent, "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ; forasmuch as ye know your labor is not in vain in the Lord !" O ye plants of heaven ! growth is your great work. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; to virtue, temperance ; to temperance, patience ; to patience, godliness ; to godliness, brotherly kindness ; to brotherly kindness, charity ; for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."



## LECTURE VII.

### THE TWO DEBTORS; OR, LOVE TO CHRIST PROPORTIONED TO THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN.

LUKE VII. 36-50. "And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him; for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at

meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

WE have thus far contemplated the general effects of the Gospel, when it is cordially received into the human heart. A few of those parables will now be selected which lead us to contemplate its more specific effects.

The scene here brought to view should not be confounded with another quite similar, but really distinct from it. The one occurred in Nain; the other in Bethany. This woman cannot have been Mary, the sister of Lazarus; for she would not have been denominated by the Pharisee "a sinner;" either as being a Pagan, or as notoriously vicious. In this case the objection to the anointing comes from the host; in the other, from some of the guests. In this the objection impeaches Jesus; in that, the woman. In this the woman appears not to have been invited, but to have entered uninvited as a spectator, according to a custom still found in the East. In the other case, Mary was a guest. Moreover, Luke alone describes this case; the other is described by Matthew, Mark, and John. Equally without reason has Mary of Magdala been confounded with this person; nor, in fact, is there the slightest foundation for the common opinion, that Mary Magdalene ever anointed the Lord's feet.

The group is before us. There sits the Son of God, the Redeemer of men. On one side of him is embodied the Pharisaic spirit, self-complacent, coldly respectful; on the other, the lowly penitent bringing her costliest thank-offering, and presenting it with a libation of tears. He is wrapped around with the mantle of self-righteousness;



satisfied with his own goodness, dignity, and importance. He indeed invites Christ to a supper; but whatever motive he had, it was not the desire of instruction; for he is already satisfied with his knowledge of the law. Nor has he any peculiar desire to honor Christ, nor any special esteem for him; for, he does not perform even the ordinary Jewish civility of offering water for his feet. He offers no anointing oil, nor kiss of friendship. But this poor sinner at his feet bathes them with her tears, and wipes them with the hairs of her head; she hath kissed them, and anointed them with the most costly unguent.

From all her actions (for we hear not a word from her) we learn that she had strong religious feelings; and from the Pharisee's reflections, as interpreted by the omniscient Redeemer, we learn that he despised her emotions, and this expression of them; and from Christ's treatment of her, we learn that her feelings were approved by him.

Her emotions were penitential grief and religious gratitude. She was a sinner, a transgressor of God's holy law; and she knew and felt it. She had discovered that sin is the evil of evils, and that she was totally under its dominion and under the condemnation it deserves. Sinful pursuits and sinful companions then stood before her awakened conscience, stamped with the marks of Divine reprobation. It sickened her heart to remember the hollow laughter of vicious mirth; the early departures from parental counsels; the wasted years spent in debasing her angelic nature, and in treasuring up stores of remorse and despair for the future. God has been disobeyed, and his righteous commandments have been violated. Guilt rests upon

her, binding the soul in triple fetters ; sin possesses the soul like a disease ; all is dark and desperate. Existence thus seen is a curse, an intolerable burden. The soul has cast itself beyond the pale of the divine sympathy : perhaps for ever. Well may she weep. But she has still another cause of tears ; the tears of joy, of love and gratitude. Somehow she has come to believe what learned Pharisees would not believe, that this being before her is a Saviour, an Almighty Saviour ; so holy, that he can make no compromise with any form or degree of sin ; yet so compassionate and powerful, that the chief of sinners may fly to his feet, and find there a refuge, sympathy and salvation. This belief brings her there. And she cannot overstate her conviction, her sorrow, her joy, her love and her thankfulness.

But the Pharisee understands nothing of it all. He looks on without wonder, without sympathy, without capacity to comprehend the scene. He reasons, very wisely in his own estimation, that Christ is not a prophet ; or, such a person could not thus approach him under any guise. John, the forerunner, had a commission which kept him in great sternness, apart from men. This the Pharisees could understand. But Christ's free manner of mingling with society, living just as others do, so far as they do right, perplexed them ; especially his treating men as human beings, not to be despised, but to be benefited, however bad they may be, was a constant scandal to them.

While this man was reasoning with himself, Christ took up his unuttered train of thought, and replied to it ; letting him understand that this penitent's expressions of affection were altogether more worthy of a



favorable regard than the cold mechanical respect which he manifested. And this remark to the Pharisee—"she loved much ; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little," is the key to the parable now before us.

There are two men indebted to a third in very different sums, the one being tenfold greater than the other. Both are generously released from their debts. Simon admits that the man to whom most is forgiven will feel the greatest degree of obligation ; both because he had suffered more from the greater difficulty or improbability of his ever discharging the debt, and because of the greater expression of kindness in the creditor making so much greater sacrifice for his benefit.

There have been several false inferences drawn from this parable, against which we should be guarded.

It is not designed to teach that there are different degrees of forgiveness. "Much forgiven" simply means a greater sense of the value of forgiveness. The phrase is employed in reference literally to the money-debt. Nor is our love the ground of our forgiveness. The two men were grateful for the remission of their indebtedness, but the remission was not an effect of that gratitude which did not exist until it had taken place. Our Lord moreover told Simon that the degree of love in the forgiven was determined by the extent of forgiveness. And to the woman he said distinctly, "*Thy faith* hath saved thee."

Nor does this parable teach that it is desirable to sin much, that we may love much. It is not the greater sin, but the greater sense of sin that makes us grateful to Christ. It teaches that,

*The Gospel produces love to Christ, by exhibiting the greatness of our necessities, and of his grace.*

Under various pretexts two features of the Gospel have been sternly opposed. To its awful exhibitions of the guilt of sin, and the ruin that awaits the soul, it has been objected,—that “fear never produced love.” And, on the other hand, men have equally objected to the laxness of its principles. Since it makes human works and human goodness of no account in procuring pardon, it discourages virtue, and makes the way to heaven too accessible for all classes of men.” Now the fact is, there is no other way of producing holiness in the human heart, but through precisely this vital element of the Gospel; an easy, and most free and generous deliverance from an infinite and endless evil. And I now proceed to show that,

#### I. NO OTHER SYSTEM OF RELIGION WILL PRODUCE TRUE LOVE TO CHRIST.

All false religions may be reduced to two classes; Pharisaism, and Rationalism.

1. *Pharisaic religions never produce love.* Their characteristic feature is the self-righteousness which abounds in religious forms and superstitious rites. You see it carried fully out in the Roman Church, where forgiveness is represented as depending on certain meritorious acts, and the performance of certain superstitious ceremonies. These religions always produce either fear or pride, because they leave the question of forgiveness dependent on personal merits. But whosoever believes his own goodness to be sufficient to cancel his sins, must feel chiefly indebted to himself. He may have other saviours; but none of them has



done for him what he has done for himself. He has in fact saved himself. But in the case of those persons who have too much conscience to admit the illusion of having merited the favor of God, there must remain a fearful anticipation of the consequences of unforgiven transgressions. And from a somewhat extensive observation of the religious feelings of self-righteous formalists, I should feel authorized to affirm—that fear prevails in proportion to sincerity. But, on the contrary,

2. *Rationalism equally fails to produce love*, because it fosters pride. It is distinguished from Pharisaism by having no such sense of sin as to call for many religious forms. It has very little to be delivered from, and therefore neither God nor man has much to do for its deliverance. What God has done in creation, or whatever he does in providence, it may recognize ; but it knows him not in redemption. Dealing with God mainly as a God of justice, it has no deep sense of indebtedness to him, and feels quite satisfied with itself. Thus the two extremes of superstition and enlightened skepticism meet in self-righteous pride.

But while neither form of false religion can produce true love to God,

## II. THE GOSPEL CAN PRODUCE THAT LOVE.

It operates effectually to counteract and remove precisely those elements of character which hinder our fervent love and gratitude to Christ ; apathy, aversion, and obstinacy. And this it effects by precisely those features in which its peculiarity consists. In opposition to all the forms of Rationalism, it exhibits the most awful condition of man as a sinner, without reserve or

qualification. Man is depraved, and yet he cannot change his own heart ; guilty, and cannot atone for his own sins ; exposed to the quenchless fires of hell, and cannot deliver himself. These are the starting-point of the Gospel. It assumes these facts. Then it differs from Pharisaism and Rationalism equally, by placing the ground of salvation out of ourselves, and apart from all human merit ; requiring simply one condition to be fulfilled—a sincere acceptance of Christ, and of salvation in and by him.

Now let us examine the effects of these two elements of the gospel in removing that apathy, that antipathy, and that obstinacy which hinder our love to God.

1. *The Gospel removes our spiritual apathy.* There is infinite beauty in Christ ; but it is not seen, by reason of the absorbing power of visible things. And while these inferior objects are ascendant, they benumb our nobler feelings, and hide from our vision the glories of Christ and redemption.

Some counteracting influence is therefore wanted, to restore the proper ascendancy to things that are real, divine and eternal. By some means the attention must be fixed on Christ, if he is to draw forth the love which he claims, and which it is our blessedness to exercise.

This is precisely what is effected in the conviction of sin. There is discovered to be a fatal internal derangement. Disorder is there. The soul is at war with itself. It is under the control of passions, of desires, of habits, which the conscience can never approve. It is blind to the glory of its Creator, and the moral beauties of his empire. There is felt the galling bond of a slavery which mocks the misery and degradation of external slavery. There is a fearful separation from God ;



there is war with his attributes, his claims, his commands, his purposes. There is an intimate alliance with the sin-party of the universe. The future is coming; with its trials; sickness; death; the great day of judgment; eternity!!

Now the soul is awake. It has ceased to dream; it sees. It has ceased to be torpid; it feels! Whither shall it fly; where is relief? Is there a Deliverer? These have become absorbing questions. Other questions are of infinitely inferior importance. Conceive then of the readiness of the soul to hear of Christ; for he is the only Physician that can now be named; he is the fountain in the desert to this thirsty wanderer; he is the morning star to rise on this tempestuous night; the bow of promise arching these angry heavens. It is frequently said that terror in our souls does not enable us to see the beauty of Christ; the fear of everlasting death does not make us love. And this is urged as a reason why men should not be alarmed. But the logic is unsound. Experience is stronger than reasoning. There is an infinite beauty in Christ; a transcendent glory, which the human soul is perfectly adapted to appreciate when certain changes have taken place in it. Among these changes this is the first, the aroused attention; the eye, the ear, the quick sensibility of the spiritual nature aroused; the stupidity of worldliness broken up; and the soul made to go forth beyond itself, beyond this hollow pageant of honor, beauty, and pleasures, to find the real good, and Him in whom is found all good, human and divine.

Before this woman found forgiveness and the Pardoner, she was first brought into great darkness, fear, and anxiety, if not despair. You see a blind Bartimeus

waiting at the way-side, eager to catch the sound of his footstep, while thousands having sight, pass by him with indifference. You see the hungry, the lepers, the afflicted, the broken-hearted following him everywhere; gazing on him with enraptured delight, while Pharisees and seekers for worldly honor see no beauty in him, that they should desire him. Men must be made to feel that they have wants infinitely greater than those the world can satisfy, before they will begin to look toward Christ, and look at him with sufficient fixedness of attention to behold that he is "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

There is another difficulty preventing men from regarding Christ with the love and gratitude which are due to him. It is antipathy to his holy authority. We therefore observe that,

2. *The deep consciousness of sin, as sin, removes the antipathy of the heart to Christ.* What antipathy to Christ? That which makes him as "a root out of a dry ground." In promising to send the Holy Spirit, the Saviour declared that he would convince men of the sin of disbelief in him. This is not a theoretic and systematic rejection of him; it is just that state of the affections which makes men willing to forget him, as long as it is safe for them. The Nazarenes thought they loved him, until he showed them that they were no more the favorites of heaven than the Gentiles; then they attempted to dash him from the brow of a hill. The multitude that were fed by him, thought they loved him, until he reprov'd their worldly-mindedness. The rich young ruler thought he had no aversion to him, until Christ showed that his service could not be made to agree with avarice. Simon, the Pharisee, perhaps



regarded himself as holding this holy prophet in high esteem, until he found that the pure and generous love of Christ esteemed a penitent more than a Pharisee.

There is much in the character of Christ which an impenitent heart may admire ; but a love for his entire character can never dwell in that heart which sees not, and does not abhor its own sinfulness. The glory of Christ is his holiness ; just that in which he is totally opposite to every human being who is unregenerated. Not to hate ourselves is therefore to hate Christ ; not to see our own deformity, is, not to see his beauty.

When the heart is fully possessed of the sense of its own sinfulness, then it appreciates the infinite loveliness of Christ. He is just the opposite of all that we are. We are selfish, he is benevolent. He loves his enemies ; he is meek and lowly in heart ; he is condescending, patient, just, true, and wise ; manifesting in all his human life, such submission to the Father, such goodness to men, such purity of motive, such depth of holy affection ! In every way the penitent, humbled soul sees him contrasted with itself. The lower we lie, the higher we can look ; the less we esteem ourselves, the more we can esteem Christ. Through the hatred of our own characters we come to a profound and fervent admiration of his. To think ourselves as good as Christ, needs but utterance in words to make it blasphemy. Not to see the contrast between him and ourselves, is, not to know either.

And it holds true with regard to redemption itself. Until we know and abhor ourselves, we do not overcome our aversion to a holy redemption. It is a redemption from sin ; from the whole dominion, and from every form of sin, just such as each impenitent heart cher-

ishes. No impenitent heart, therefore, sees the magnitude and glory of it; the kindness of the motive, the importance of the result, and the glory of him who achieved it. So long as any one is impenitent, he has not seen the intrinsic and essential evil of sin; and so he cannot see the glory of redemption. Worldly stupidity and Pharisaic self-complacency may admit of a very refined sensibility in hating vice as it is dishonorable, not consistent with self-respect, and against the welfare of society. And hence they can entertain considerable respect for Christ and Christianity, as opposing vice. But, not seeing the depths of sin in their own hearts; not having a sufficiently purified vision, to loathe and abhor their selfishness and pride, they cannot appreciate Christ, the Gospel, nor true penitence in others; nor see the glory of a redemption which eradicates all sin from the heart, and raises the vilest to the purity of God and heaven.

This made the difference between these two persons, the Pharisee and the penitent. "She loved much," said the Saviour, "for she had much forgiven." He had entered that house an invited guest. And yet the host had not extended to him the usual civility of water for his feet; a custom which we can trace back even to Abraham's day; for he said to his guests, "let a little water be fetched, I pray you, and wash your feet." But this woman washed them with her tears. Nor did she hesitate to employ her hair in wiping them. This we find, from pagan history, was a very strong expression of grief, as well as of religious reverence. When Hannibal threatened Rome with his army, the Roman ladies flew to the temples and altars, and washed the floors of the temple with their hairs. The Pharisee had



given no kiss of peace ; but the penitent had not ceased to kiss his feet. This, even among the heathen, was a token of reverence and subjection. Sir Robert Kerr Porter received it from a Persian, on whom he had conferred some favor. He had furnished no anointing ; she had brought the costly alabaster-box, and the finest ointment, to express her devout gratitude to him who had redeemed her soul. Her love was founded upon a knowledge of that holiness which was entirely in contrast with her own sinfulness ; and likewise in the immeasurable benefit he had conferred on her.

There is another hindrance to our exercising love and gratitude toward Christ, which a right sense of our sins removes.

3. *It is obstinacy.* Dependence on Christ is a voluntary state ; and so is independence of him. None but Christ can save us ; and he will save only those who earnestly commit themselves to him. Whatever then will break up this obstinacy of the heart, will prepare us to appreciate his excellence and our indebtedness to him. We are absolutely dependent on Christ for salvation ; and the extent of our necessities, which he, and he alone can supply, is beyond all our powers of computation. And yet our self-righteous, proud and obstinate hearts refuse to admit the evidence of our bankruptcy, our utter helplessness ; and consequently they prevent our seeing the greatness of his love, and the immense blessings he has procured for us. So long as pride and a good opinion of ourselves possess the heart, we are rather repelled, than attracted by a large portion of Christ's sayings and actions. The Jews were continually looking for a political deliverer, because they did not know their need of a spiritual deliverer. And

hence they were constantly disappointed in Christ; looking for magnificent displays of intellectual and political power, there was no form nor comeliness in him as a Saviour of the sinful soul. Instead of being what they desired, they found him attending to the cry of a poor beggar; taking little children to his arms; washing his disciples' feet; receiving the homage of outcasts from society; and prizing it more than the sumptuous entertainments of the wealthy. Pride can see nothing attractive in his position, when he pronounces the humble blessed, and promises the kingdom of heaven to the lowly in heart. Self-righteousness is not drawn towards him, when he invites the weary and heavy-laden to come to him. As we see, the effect on the Pharisees was, to shock their morbid consciences, to alarm their fears, and disgust their love of caste. Their self-complacency rendered them incapable of appreciating the character of Christ, because they esteemed their own; his love to men, for they knew no such sentiment; his work of mercy, for they had no consciousness of its adaptedness to man's necessities.

But when the soul is brought to feel that it must have spiritual help, and that none but Christ can furnish that, then it can begin both to depend upon him, and to admire that infinite condescension and grace which adapt him to the wants of men. And the more the sense of our guilt and corruption drives us to him; makes us study his word, to enlarge our views of his character, to familiarize the mind to his peculiar, glorious image; the more varied the discovery of our own spiritual wants, by which we discover the variety of his



excellent qualities, the deeper and stronger does our love to him become.

In the narrative then before us we have these two contrasted feelings vividly embodied in living characters. We have not the means of determining how much the woman knew of Christ, or whether she had received from his lips the word of pardon before. But she believed in him as her Saviour. And gratitude mingled with her reverence and love; for Christ says: "She loved much, for she had much forgiven." Her feelings were intense, but not extravagant. Christ knows what is involved in forgiveness from God. And he is willing that the pardoned sinner shall exult in it. The past, that had been filled only with the images of her degradation, was now changed in its relations to her. It could humble her, but no more crush her with despondency. It now served to reveal her in contrast with herself. She was changed; and was very conscious of the glorious transformation. She looked within, and saw a purified, peaceful spirit, free in its submission to God; joined to all the good, in its dispositions and pursuits. She looked to God; and He frowned no more. "I have blotted out," he says, "for ever, thy transgressions, as a thick cloud." And here sits before her the Being to whom she is indebted, not only for the assurance of it, but for the pardon itself. Is it wonderful that she should weep? Is it strange that she should rejoice; that she should love?

And there sits the Pharisee. Can he see the glory of that Redeemer? No. Can he feel the cords of gratitude binding him to that Friend of our lost race? No; his obstinate refusal to relinquish high thoughts of himself, to repent and cast himself on

Christ, has put an eternal barrier between him and his Saviour.

The men held up in the Scriptures as attaining to great eminence, exhibit most prominently the depths of penitence, and fervor of love to Christ. Paul cries out in view of his sins : “ O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death ? ” Did he love Christ ? What are his letters, but glowing pages burning with almost seraphic ardor of love to his Redeemer !

It is then evident, that the degree of our love to Christ depends upon the clearness and fulness of our conviction of sin, and the simplicity and strength of our faith in him. The more we see of the evil to which our souls have been exposed, the more grateful shall we be for our deliverance. The more absolutely we depend upon Christ, and trace all to him, the more deeply shall we feel our indebtedness.

And this consideration shows us how indispensable it is that men should hear what are considered *the strong doctrines of the Gospel*. Some systems of religion are commended for their gentleness and agreeableness. But a Gospel which flatters men, and comforts them in their impenitence, will never bring them to that love and gratitude which the Saviour commends in this penitent woman. The gentleness of the Gospel does not lie where many suppose, but in its treatment of the penitent. All false systems either fail by extending their consolations to the impenitent, or by refusing them to the penitent. But Christ opens up to us without reserve the horrible view of our depravity, our guilt, our fearful prospects out of him. And by the terror of the



Lord he persuades us to be reconciled to God. And it is in this deep view of our ruin that we learn to love Christ, and to cherish gratitude towards him. There is immense danger in any vicious course. No one can tell when he is crushing the last germ of life in his soul. But the dangers of the self-righteous spirit are perhaps even greater. It seems to remove the soul even farther from Christ and heaven. It cannot repent; for, it has no sense of the evil of its transgressions; they seem to it to be trivial, because it has perverted the true moral standard within, and formed its judgments, not by God's standard, but its own. It so keeps the life within the bounds of propriety as to prevent the conscience from being disturbed. It has public sentiment, too, in its favor. And it fosters that egotism and pride which are harder to conquer than the passions themselves. There is therefore true, enlightened kindness, only in preaching the strong doctrines of the Gospel.

*We may inquire how we are testifying our love and gratitude to Christ.* Has he loved us with a love with which no other love can be compared? Was yours an utter bankruptcy, hopeless and helpless? And did he come to your relief; and has he relieved you, blotting out every sentence of condemnation recorded against you? Has he placed you among the children of God, and opened to you the gates of the heavenly city? Then you must have wept at his feet; then you are ready to bring the alabaster box of precious ointment, and pour it on his feet. With you this expression of love may be a patient enduring of severe trials at his hand; a sacrifice of some earthly honor, or possession, or comfort, that you may be unencumbered

for his service. It may be special efforts to cultivate your spirit for extraordinary service; a consecration of yourself or some beloved child to foreign service.

In whatever way, how does your love and gratitude manifest itself?



## LECTURE VIII.

### THE LABORERS PAID; OR, HUMILITY IN REGARD TO OUR MERITS.

MATT. XX. 1-16. "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that* is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that *were* hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."

LUKE XVII. 7-10. "But which of you, having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the

field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

WE shall find these two passages to have the same scope. The first compares the administration of Christ's kingdom on earth to a farmer employing laborers. In eastern countries, and even in Europe, the custom still remains, of farmers going into the markets to hire reapers who have assembled from neighboring, and even remote districts. This man goes out at several distinct hours, engaging men to work in his vineyard. Some are hired at the very first working hour, at a fixed, and, probably, the ordinary price, of a penny or denarius a day; which is equal to fifteen cents. The others leave the rate of wages to the option of their employer. In the evening the steward is ordered to bring them together, that they may receive their compensation. Beginning at those hired only an hour before, he pays them the denarius; and so goes through the whole company, paying all the same. This surprises and offends those who have been working twelve hours; that they should receive the same compensation with those who had labored only one hour, and that in the cooler hour of the evening. The employer replies to them, that he did them no injustice; that he had a right to pay the others as much as he pleased, without consulting them; and that his generosity should not excite their envy.

The other parable refers to the customs of society



concerning a man who serves another. If he were employed as a farm-laborer and a house-servant, he would not expect when returning from the field to be served by his employer, but would wait on him.

These simple stories or parables have caused much difficulty to commentators, especially the former. And the reason of it I suppose to be, that the shade of feeling they are designed to expose is one of the most subtle of all those that hinder the progress of spiritual life ; having an aim somewhat similar to those of the Prodigal Son, and the Pharisee and Publican, yet striking even a deeper vein than they.

The doctrine they exhibit is this :

*In the Gospel, gratuity is more prominent than rewards.*

The Gospel does not exclude the idea of rewards, but presents it in a modified form, and earnestly guards the heart against selfish emulation, boasting or claiming, in reference to others ; and against dealing with God on a *quid pro quo* or hireling principle. I would now allude to one or two expositions. It has been maintained by some that this parable presents

“ *A vindication of rewards by merit.*” But see what difficulties attend this. That merit should be rewarded is a truism belonging to the light of nature. Even heathen philosophy contains it. Rewarding according to merit is the grand principle of natural justice, which it did not require a teacher from heaven to explain. If that were all Christ meant to teach, no parable would have been necessary ; for it is a principle of nature, that every man reaps as he sows. And our Lord is not here teaching a truth of nature, but a truth of grace ; and one somewhat difficult for the

human mind to receive and retain ; a fundamental principle of the new dispensation from heaven. He was teaching this difficult truth, that the first are last, and the last first ; that some men will get a penny for one hour's labor, while for twelve hours' labor others will get no more. Here is no natural justice surely. But in order to reconcile with this explanation the fact that they all received a penny apiece, it has been said that the laborers hired last accomplished as much as the first. It is sufficient to say that nothing would be more important to state in the parable than that, and that the omission of such an indispensable point from the parable would be fatal to it, if it were intended to teach that men are rewarded according to their merit. Others have attempted to remove this difficulty by affirming that the labor of the last was more valuable than that of the first ; and that thus the parable was intended to teach that quality is as important as quantity in laboring for God. But why then does not the employer vindicate himself on that obvious ground ? No such thing is said. He throws himself back on principles more remote ; on his absolute proprietorship, and his rights. Will is one thing, justice another. The defence here set up is : sovereign will, and the right to exercise it. " Have I not a right to do what I will with my own ? " It has been an utter perversion of this parable to apply the eleventh hour laborers to conversions late in life as the main point. To be so, it would be necessary that all such persons could say : " we are unemployed, because no man hath offered us employment." We are not converted sooner because we have not heard the Gospel. Whatever encouragement it gives to those who may have entered into the



service late, it gives no encouragement to entering it late. The scope of the parable is not found there; that is merely a part of its drapery.

*Some have applied it to the Jews*, as a warning to them against despising Gentile converts. Then there ought to have been only two invitations, instead of four or five. But this narrows the subject to a degree that is insufferable, and utterly removes the parable from the occasion of its delivery. It was not the envious, conceited Jews whom the Lord here addressed, but his Christian disciples, who had not manifested any contempt for Gentile converts, of whom they as yet knew nothing.

Some consider the parable “*a warning against remissness.*” Then prominence should have been given to the fact that the earliest hired were remiss. But nothing of the kind appears. The ground of vindication is totally different from this. If it were their want of diligence that caused their wages to be no more than those of the other workmen, the lord of the vineyard would have assigned that reason, instead of putting it on the ground of sovereignty; “have I not a right to do what I will with my own?”

We can accept neither of these explanations. The manifest design of the parable is, to inculcate humility in estimating our own good deeds; charity, in looking upon the rewards bestowed on others; and confiding submission in putting ourselves, our good deeds, and our compensation into the hands of God our Redeemer. To inculcate these practical principles the theory taught in the parable is, that

*The rewards of heaven, while according with justice, are modified by grace.*

Peter having seen the rich young ruler refuse to become poor for Christ's sake, and having heard Christ declare that the rich can hardly enter the kingdom of heaven, replied by inquiring what reward they should have who had left all for him. The answer was—that they should have great rewards. But, at the same time, they who had done much and forsaken much for Christ, must be warned of the danger of contemplating their sacrifices in a self-complacent spirit. A mercenary spirit might come in there, to mar much good, and make the first last. To warn them against pride, and to check the hireling spirit, was the design of this parable. And by forgetting that, all the embarrassment of interpreting it has been created. It was not a warning to the unhappy young man who refused to follow Jesus; for he had gone sorrowful away. It was not addressed to the self-righteous Pharisees, nor to the heedless multitude, but to the faithful disciples. It was, to show them that while the spirit of self-renunciation and zeal would be rewarded, there was something still higher than that reward; it was, to possess the spirit of humility, and of unreserved submission and confidence. Peter's spirit was right, and his inquiry was legitimate; and yet the tendency of looking much in that direction is dangerous. Humility is the only grace that seems to live out of the reach of danger. It is the safeguard and shield of all the other graces, as well as the inheritor of the richest blessings. The evil involved in his inquiry was, that it put his relations to the Saviour on a mercenary footing, that of wages; so much work, so much pay. There was rather too eager a looking for recompense; a somewhat selfish grasping at the rewards of obe-



dience. And there was also some degree of self-complacency in comparing his noble self-renunciation with that man's avarice. All this needed to be corrected. And it is corrected by these parables ; which are not a prophecy of what will be, but a warning against the tendency of certain dispositions ; against pride, the want of charity, and imagining a merit in their sacrifices.

None of the other explanations of this parable which I have mentioned, meet the occasion in any degree. This does : it shows that pride will destroy love ; will even lead us to murmur against our righteous sovereign and bounteous benefactor ; to envy towards our more favored brethren, and an opposition to the very grace by which we are saved.

I conceive then that the laborers represent not persons but principles ; and all other explanations make the parable so unnatural that their advocates have been compelled to resort, as we see, to violent alterations and forced accommodations of the text. Either they make all rewards in heaven to be equal, by making the penny apiece the burden of the parable ; or, they make the patriarchs murmur in heaven at seeing the Gentiles blessed, by making it refer to the Jews particularly ; or, they throw away the very moral of the story as given by our Teacher ; which is, that self-denial with all its importance is not as great, as difficult, or as noble a grace as humility.

In this view the parable of the servant returning from the field, inculcates the same lesson in a different aspect of it. The eager grasping after our reward, the exact measurement of our merits, is an inconsistency with the dispensation of grace. If we stand on wages, then we may get only the wages of grace itself, for

there are such. But if we always count ourselves unprofitable servants; at the best, having done nothing more than our duty; if, after ploughing, we are willing to come and still serve in the house, until our gracious Lord is ready to have us repose and refresh ourselves at his table, then we shall be truly first, while least in our own estimation; and there is no other way of being first in the kingdom of heaven.

The ground we have gone over, is then this. We have objected to the explanation which makes the parable a vindication of the justice of God in rewarding men; for, if there is here any vindication, it is not of equal rewards for equal labor, but for unequal, of paying as much for one hour as twelve. And then it is asserted in other parts of the Scriptures that the rewards of heaven are to be very various in degree. One star will differ from another in the glorious firmament. The first shall be last. We object also to applying the parable to eleventh-hour conversions, as in any degree a special point of its doctrine. But the occasion of its deliverance, the maxims which precede and follow it, and its whole drift lead us to suppose that it presents these laborers, not as resembling us in our work or our rewards, but rather to illustrate these principles; that the rewards of grace are gratuitous even when promised; and that grace will bestow many rewards that are not promised; that there is nowhere any room for boasting; confirming the great principle afterward so strongly presented by Paul in his letters to the churches in Rome and Galatia; “now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteous-



ness." At the best we are unprofitable servants, and should ever feel it. In the Saviour's account of the last judgment, he describes the righteous as wondering what they have ever done that can be so rewarded. Their spirit is in direct contrast with that of the men who had been first hired. "Lord, when . . . . saw we thee a hungered, and gave thee no meat?"

It is evident that the Saviour attached great importance to the maxim, "the first shall be last, and the last first." It is put at the beginning of this parable, and then repeated at the end; a case without parallel in his teaching. And whatever therefore fails to explain that, fails to explain the parable. It does not mean that the first in privilege shall be last in reward; if it was designed as a continuation of his answer to the inquiry, what shall we have that have forsaken all? it must meet the state of mind involved in that inquiry, which was, partly, a spirit of trustful reliance upon the promise of God, that he would compensate for all sacrifices made in his cause. But there was mingled with it too much self-complacency, and too eager a regard to recompense for service. Therefore the maxim of our Lord must mean that even the most advanced in sacrifices and toils for him may come short of others who are more honored in God's sight; they who have combined with their sacrifices and toils a self-abasing and unpretending spirit. These first hired had an envious, murmuring spirit in connection with their diligence. They misapprehended justice, and contested with grace; they murmured at their employer, and envied their fellow-laborers. It cannot be questioned, I think, that the parable was designed to reprove that spirit, and that the strength of it lies in the reply: "Friend," or

sir, "I do thee no wrong." In giving thee a penny, I meet the claims of justice, and keep my word. "Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?" Is it not envy that sees only wrong in my kindness to others?

*We must then hold the doctrine of rewards in a modest, humble spirit.* There are rewards offered by the Gospel. How glorious is that here promised to Peter; "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel; shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." And it is right that we should be greatly affected by such promises. Moses had respect to the recompense of reward. Our Redeemer, "for the joy set before him, endured the cross." The Gospel abounds in promises conditioned on certain actions, if they include a right spirit. It must be our duty to be appropriately affected by these promised blessings; that is, to desire them earnestly.

But nothing is more characteristic of the Gospel than that it is the broad sphere in which SOVEREIGN GOODNESS acts. Justice has its full operation in this dispensation, but in a subordinate sphere. "Grace reigns by righteousness through Jesus Christ." It was to answer no claim of ours that Christ came into the world; that the Holy Spirit descended; that he enters any of our poor hearts, that he continues there to the end; that our sins are forgiven, our petitions for favors answered, and our souls saved. "Salvation is by grace,



through faith.” “Of his own will begat he us.” “Of him, and through him, and to him are all things.” “The *gift* of God is eternal life.” Now, if our minds should be fixed wholly upon rewards, and our good deeds and attainments, pride must come in. Paul had attained to a very definite anticipation of the crown of life; yet how he glories in exalting his Redeemer, in ascribing all to grace; how foolish it seems to him to tell what he had done and suffered, even when the sacred cause he loved, demanded that he should. There is a full manifestation of the free action of the divine will, even in nature. God hath made us what we are; hath placed us where we are. Therefore we are warned never to boast of our endowments, our position, or our achievements, as though we had not received them all from God. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me.”

To say nothing here of the spirit of self-righteousness, which makes men hope for heaven through their own goodness, there is abundant opportunity for pride to work in the heart, even after it has renounced its own righteousness, and submitted to the righteousness of God. It rises in the heart of the convert who has just made a few attainments; has given up a little for his Redeemer, and made some apparent progress, even beyond older disciples. He is now ready to be flattered; jealous of being overlooked; pleased with himself; ready to wonder at his superiority to many others; thinks his own prospects very bright, and those of the greater part of the Church, at least, questionable. A

more advanced believer is exposed to this subtle snare when he has made some decided progress, accomplished some important service, made some severe sacrifice to duty, or enjoyed some especial communion with God. In fact every Christian is exposed to some degree or form of it. And therefore it is important that we hold such views of our demerit, and of the perfect freedom of divine grace, that we shall not give place to this insinuating self-flattery.

One effect of pride is presented to our view in the suggestion, that the servant might be disposed to look to his own comfort when returning from the field, instead of attending to the work that belonged to his office. So we may sometimes feel that we have done so much, as to make us more willing to repose than to continue our labors. Thus it makes us relax our efforts, by an over-estimate of the importance of that which we have done. God has indeed been pleased to attach certain expressions of his approbation to our good actions; but we must never forget that we are indebted to his grace for our good intentions and the execution of them; that a man cannot be profitable to God as to a fellow-man; that all rewards are themselves really gratuitous. And we must be fully reconciled to these facts, or we can have no real piety. The spirit of a believer is, in no respects, that of a hireling; although it was once objected to Christianity that it promoted a mercenary spirit. Romanism is the very embodiment of the spirit of traffic. It deals with the quantity of good works, overlooking their quality. It makes an open account with heaven, and strikes a balance in favor of the Church. It charges money for pardons, and money for salvation. The whole of this



spirit is hateful, even though it be not carried so far as that fearful system carries it. "What shall we have if we do so much and sacrifice so much?" It is well to look at the glorious things promised, and to strive for our crown; but if we stick too closely to the idea of reward, we are in danger of over-estimating the excellence of our actions, and especially their merit. And then there is a solemn import in the words of our Saviour; "the first shall be last, and the last first; for, many are called, but few chosen." What are the rewards of the Gospel? The answer to that will illustrate the meaning of this phraseology. If these rewards consisted of money, or lands, or merely stations of power, we might not so easily comprehend the paramount importance of humility. But the rewards of heaven are chiefly of two kinds; one of which we may call subjective, or the expansion, enlargement and completion of personal qualities. In this sense principles are more to be rewarded than actions. And therefore humility, as it is the opposite to pride, envy, and discontent, is indispensable for enjoying the highest blessedness of heaven. And then, of those rewards which are objective, God's love and communion with him are the highest. But nothing is more essential to a creature's communion with God than the profoundest humility. "I dwell," says Jehovah, "with him that is contrite and of a humble spirit." We may then be first in every thing else, but we shall be last in the favor of God if we lose that meek and lowly spirit which, in his sight, is of great price. The first shall be last. We have seen men fall by pride, and nations perish by exalting themselves. When Ephraim spake trembling, he ex-

alted himself in Israel ; but when he offended in Baal, he died.”

“ Many are called, but few chosen.” Of the many who are called into the kingdom of God, few enter so profoundly into the peculiar spirit of this wonderful dispensation as to appreciate the prominence of grace in it. Few receive the amazing grace of God with that deep and permanent sense of their unworthiness and their ill-desert, which enables them to bear the consciousness of exaltation, the joy and the hopes imparted by the Gospel, without any increase of self-esteem, any pride or envy. Few are chosen, approved as in the highest class. This was said directly to Peter, and he ultimately profited by it.

The practical lesson then which comes out of this parable is—to guard against a proud, and a mercenary spirit. Especially should we look well to our conception of the kind of rewards we expect to receive. Too few indeed direct their thoughts sufficiently to “the recompense of reward ;” and yet, without having the subject in our thoughts sufficiently to draw the affections strongly toward heaven, we may be indulging a conception of some kind of reward which is entirely foreign to that perfect state of existence. If we definitely conceive of the blessedness of heaven as consisting in the approbation of God, communion with him, and the perfection of love and humility in our own hearts, we shall bestow our chief care upon the culture of those excellencies of character which most please God, and most fit us for the blessed society of heaven. This will guard us against any thing like a mercenary spirit, or a mere outward working for wages.



Let us keep constantly in view our own unworthiness and demerit. We have incurred the wrath of God. He found us at enmity with him. He has freely pardoned us indeed; but we can never forgive ourselves if we have a right apprehension of our sinfulness. Never then can we murmur at what a beneficent Redeemer bestows, as being below our deserts. Never shall we boast of our attainments or our achievements.

Let us be careful not to make favorable comparisons of our own labors and sacrifices with those of our brethren. Peter fell into that fault, and received the rebuke couched in the parable of the laborers.

Let us remember that salvation is wholly of grace, from beginning to end. There is a holding out of rewards to quicken our diligence; but they are not, as the old divines would say, rewards of condignity, but of congruity; they are not payments of wages, not a just award of rights, but distributions of grace. What then if we should find others whom we imagine to be inferior to ourselves in any respect, placed above us, or rewarded with the same amount as we? There will be no envy, nor grudging; no unhallowed emulation; but a sincere rejoicing that our God is so gracious, and that our fellow-men are so much blessed.

Love is the chief grace, and humility is its body-guard. Love is so valuable that Christ puts the highest price on the most trivial act which expresses it,—“Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my disciples, ye did it unto me.” The slightest shade of the feeling of personal merit prevents our full appreciation of God’s kindness to us, and our perfect reconciliation to the various allotments of Provi-

dence here, and to the various distribution of the rewards of heaven. "Have I not a right?" will be the eternal challenge from the throne. "Yea, Lord," will be the eternal response of all that dwell around it.



## LECTURE IX.

### THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN; OR, HUMILITY IN PRAYER.

LUKE XVIII. 9-14. “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

THIS is a lofty specimen of moral painting, in which the lesson inculcated is—“he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, he that exalteth himself shall be abased;”—the arrogant assumption of excellence which does not belong to us will exclude us from that grace which can truly exalt us. Two men here pass before us; they are on their way to the house of prayer, coming from the two extremes of society, as the world estimates it. The one had established a reputation with men and with himself, for great excellence of character; the other has, in his own estimation, no claim on God’s approbation. They both resort to the

same temple, at the same hour of public prayer, and at the same instant ; but there the resemblance ceases. Their views, feelings, and objects are unlike ; their manner of praying, their exercises, and their reception are in complete contrast. And by having them brought together in one view, we may observe the contrast more distinctly. As we see them approaching the house of God, (with no other knowledge of them than that the one is esteemed a very excellent man, and the other belongs to a class exceedingly offensive to his fellow-citizens, and generally regarded as personally rapacious and cruel,) we should presume totally in favor of the former. We have forgotten, however, in this judgment, that they are going up not to meet man, but Him who looketh not on the outward appearance ; to whom rank, talents, birth, condition, reputation and wealth are no recommendation. All that meets our eye thus far is a pharisee and a Publican. Who, may naturally be inquired, can hesitate to pronounce between them ? Let us not answer, however, until we have observed more closely and continuously. We shall yet discover in these men the personification of pride and humility ; both at the altar of sacrifice ; both in the presence of the Searcher of hearts ; both appealing to his omniscient scrutiny.

The subject of the parable is : *Self-righteousness in prayer unanswered, unblest ; humility in prayer answered and blest.*

The one of these men, we are told, went down to his house justified, rather than the other. He was approved, accepted, blest ; the other unapproved, unaccepted, unblest. And this different result of their respective prayers is here shown to be occasioned by a



difference in the spirit, and in the object of prayer  
We notice,

I. THE CONTRASTED SPIRIT OF THEIR PRAYERS.

1. *In the one we see Pride ; in the other, Humility.*  
It is not easy to say much about the manner of praying, without doing injury. But as the Master has given prominence to the attitudes and motions of these men, we may safely follow him. On the one side we see a man entering the house of God, looking up and around, which he might properly do if his heart had been overflowing with thankfulness to God, and love to men. But with him it was the utterance of pride. His whole air expresses this : “I am entirely satisfied with myself ; and I take it for granted that others think of me as I do of myself.” “He stood and prayed *thus with himself.*” There is a volume in that phrase. If it had been private prayer, the more completely apart, the better. But public solitude is a solecism, of which pride alone can be guilty. All it had to do with other men, was, to measure its superiority to them, and secure their homage. It stands apart, cold, selfish, and self-admiring. There are no common interests with human nature ; no tender links which bind it to the family of man. Alone, and above others ; that is the essence of pride, whether it put on the air of a fashionable, or of a saint. This man did differ from the other in some points ; but the resemblance was in a hundred things where the difference was in one. And, moreover, just in the points where they differed he was the inferior. They both had immortal souls ; were sinners ; had sorrows, sins, trials, temptations, were exposed to death ; had need of divine mercy. Intellectually considered,

his feelings and his conduct were contemptible in the sight of God ; but morally, there was no crime in the publican's life comparable to this heaven-insulting self-complacency.

The parable, we are told, was addressed to some who were conceited of their own righteousness, and despised others. True goodness never produced that effect ; false goodness always does.

But was he not grateful to God ? No ; his very gratitude was corrupted by this venomous principle. If he had possessed any goodness to be ascribed to God, modesty would have reserved the recognition of that for the closet. He had embraced a false standard of excellence in order to think highly of himself ; and then he came to insult the Deity in his temple, by holding it up before him and before men, to mislead them. True gratitude had no companionship with that unfair comparison of himself with his neighbor, and that contempt for him. True gratitude to God from us sinners will always refer mainly to that common ground on which he has placed us all ; and then, if God has done for us what he has not done for others, we shall be most careful to recognize that it is he who hath made us differ.

Now leave this man standing alone, and turn your attention to that poor, trembling worshipper, who scarcely ventures to cross the threshold of the audience-chamber of the Most High. The first thing that strikes you is, that he did not come here to be seen of men. There is nothing in his dress or manner that betrays such a feeling. His business is with God ; and since the King has appointed the interview within the temple, a corner will answer as well as any other place.



How much true dignity is there in his worship compared with that of the other. The one went in with the crowd, and then withdrew from them and went nearer the altar, because he thought himself more worthy. The other went alone too; not into a conspicuous nor exalted place, but into a corner,—“standing afar off” describes his place. He wanted to express his sense of moral distance from God, and of unfitness and unworthiness to approach him; and then he would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast in sorrow and self-reproach. He could not look toward heaven, for he had offended its King; nor to the altar, for it condemned him; nor to those around him, for they could not help him. His case was so desperate that no angel could help him. He was before the holy God of heaven a sinner. He needed mercy, mere grace; and he had no claim upon God for it; nor could he tell how it would terminate with him. It was a solemn moment. He was looking forward to the judgment, and onward to eternity. Well might he bow his head and smite his breast.

Humility is not a mistaken sense of inferiority, which results from a false standard. Whatever a man thinks true excellence consists in, he will think humbly of himself for not possessing. Hence men are right in condemning a morbid humility. That consists in condemning ourselves for not conforming to a false standard of excellence; and thus degrades the soul. But true humility consists in recognizing all the inferiority that pertains to our positions as creatures, dependent and limited; and especially our guilty and miserable condition as sinners. It is not submission, because a proud soul may submit to force; nor condescension,

because that is not confined to humility ; nor is it being abased, for Satan is as proud in hell as he was in heaven. But it is self-abasement on account of sin and its consequences. “ Be merciful to me a sinner ! ” A sinner ! Ah ! he had now begun to learn the significance of that word. His eye saw, his soul felt its dreadful meaning. To be humble, is to be willing to know ourselves and our deserts. Did we know how many vain thoughts lodge within us, how many evil inclinations, how many selfish purposes, how our words sound in God’s ear, how our actions appear to him, we should find humility to be the only rational state for man.

Thus we see consequently in these two men, manifested respectively,

2. *Self-commendation, and self-condemnation.* It was an ingenious, but a wicked way of self-flattery, to put it into the form of thanksgiving. But we meet the same thing in our day. “ Thank God,” says the tongue, “ I am not like such and such a one.” “ Thank God,” says the heart ; “ thank God,” says the manner, “ I am not like you, nor you. Come thou not near me ; I am better than thou.” The Pharisee knows nothing about himself, but that he is so much better than other men ; the Publican only knows that he is a sinner. He remembers his ingratitude for so much mercy, and cannot look up. He compares his meanness with God’s majesty, his sinfulness with the Divine holiness, and exclaims with Ezra—“ O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God ; for my iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown unto the heaven.” True humility makes us know our sins, and ingenuously confess them ; without which there can be no acceptable prayer, no recon-



ciliation with our offended God. And while the spirit of each of these men is so different from that of the other, we observe another contrast. It is in,

## II. THE OBJECTS THEY SOUGHT IN PRAYER.

Both considered themselves as going to the temple on a legitimate errand. But the objects they seek are so diametrically contrary to each other, that they cannot both be right. And it is well for us that an infallible judge has pronounced between them.

The two respective objects of their search were, self-flattery and divine mercy.

1. *The Pharisee went to the temple to flatter himself.* He did not go to seek God; he not having, in fact, any special occasion for him. He did not go to please God. There seems nowhere a desire to present that sacrifice of a broken heart which God delights in. There is no confession of sin, which is so constantly enjoined upon us. There is no expression of love and confidence; no genuine gratitude nor praise.

He has not come to ask any favor. Prayer is supplication; but he makes no request. It is the expression of want; and to pray aright, we must regard our necessities rather than our attainments; and to be prepared for prayer, the mind must dwell more upon our wants than our possessions or attainments. Bourdaloue has finely said, that our good actions benefit us; but the recollection of them corrupts us, by inflating our pride. Our bad actions injure us; but the recollection of them may benefit us by humbling us to prayer.

He has not come to pray for God's kingdom, for his nation, his fellow-citizens, his fellow-men, or himself.

Nothing of all this is in his prayer. It is simply to boast, under the guise of praying and thanking God. No doubt the temple was to him a delightful place, and the hour of prayer a delightful season ; because they were associated with such a sweet indulgence of pride. There he was accustomed to receive the greetings of men. Even the priests bowed to him with more than usual respect. And more important still, he there had a season of leisurely self-recollection to refresh his memory with the catalogue of his virtues ; and mistaking even his own approbation for God's, he went down to his house, as he supposed, approved of by the Searcher of hearts. He gets what he seeks ; but it is not mercy, nor God's approval.—The other came to obtain,

2. *Mercy.* He sought God. He was burdened with sin ; and man can neither pardon nor renew the sinner. He thought of himself, not as compared with others, but as he was before God. Others' sins do not excuse his. His are his own grief and shame and burden. My name is *sinner*, by nature and by practice ; in thought, word, and deed ; from my youth upward I was light, vain, self-willed, living for myself. I have grown up worldly, ambitious, proud. I have broken God's holy law in numberless ways. I am a sinner in spite of all that God has done for me.

Mercy ! *mèrcy* ! I need mercy. This will give him peace and access to God ; raise his heart above the world ; make him like Christ, and useful ; prepare him for heaven, and take him there.

Mercy is not mere goodness. It is the opposite of justice ; goodness toward the guilty, as that is severity toward the guilty. It is the setting aside of punish-



ment that is deserved. It is spontaneous goodness, not goodness by necessity, not goodness as a matter of course. It has reference to want, and not to merit. It fills the heart of God. It has as wide a scope as our ill-desert, depravity, actual and prospective misery. The first thing for us sinful creatures to seek is—its forgiveness, its aid.

But to seek to flatter ourselves, to entertain God with a recital of our excellent qualities and deeds, to fortify our good opinion of ourselves, is contrary to all the instructions of Christ, is abhorrent to the Most High God. Only the humble can pray; for Jehovah declares, that the proud he knoweth afar off; but to that man he will look, who is of an humble and contrite heart.

We find, then, a twofold cause for the different results of these prayers. The one is, that both gained their objects respectively. The one sought to flatter himself; and verily he had his reward; he succeeded in his object. The other sought for mercy; he looked to God, entreating him to exercise that attribute which has as wide a scope as our ill-desert, our depravity, our present and our prospective misery. This is the first object which sinful man ought to seek—the forgiveness and the aid of divine mercy.

But it is not enough to seek a right object in prayer; for, there may be even Pharisees who feel their need of mercy. Their pride comes in under another form. They seek forgiveness and sanctification, grace and heaven indeed, but not on God's conditions. Those conditions are: repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The advent of the Son of God into this world is

founded upon the fact that the human race as one, has departed from God and broken his law. There are no exceptions. Nothing but pride makes any one regard himself as an exception ; nothing but unbelief rejects the provision made for sinners. Faith accepts it.

The fault of the Pharisee was not immorality, nor the neglect of religious worship : but relying on his negative morality for justification, and substituting an external religious service for the religion of the heart. Fasting and tithes, which were designed to awaken a sense of inward poverty and need, and to bring men to feel themselves to be stewards of God's possessions, the Pharisees employed as substitutes for heart-piety, and occasions of self-exaltation. This man's prayer had two parts ; both of which neutralized the law and the Gospel. The negative part, which stated what he did not do, was designed to make the law consist only in negatives, and a very few of them. It was designed, too, to show that he was not a sinner, and therefore needed not the Gospel. The positive part which described his religious services, represented a poor paltry tithing of income and abstinence from food as satisfying the demands of the law, and as comprehending the whole meaning and spirit of the Gospel. The parable was addressed to those who trusted in themselves. "Cursed is he who trusteth in man." But trusting in one's-self is the Pharisaism of the human heart. Trusting in Christ is the vital element of prayer. Faith is the very breathing of a soul that realizes itself cut off on every side from human help, and has no resources in itself. How dreadful then is self-flattery ! It was the sin of this man ; and it is the sin that sticks most closely to every man. It made his morality a



sin, and his religion a mockery. To think little of our sins, and much of our virtues, is the usual habit. To get as high as we can, in our own eyes, rather than to see ourselves as God sees us, is our effort. When men speak well of us, we welcome it, remember it, recur to it as a beautiful person returns to her mirror. When men speak against us we are made angry, we stop not to examine how much reason they may have for so unfavorable an opinion of us. When the word and spirit of the Lord show us our sins, we find the subject so disagreeable that we turn away from it. But here our Saviour has furnished us a solemn warning, by showing the hideous features of pride in prayer; of pride strutting before the Majesty of Heaven, and spreading its gaudy beauty before that eye which sees defects in the heavens and folly in the angels! Here we see it losing its labor, and leading its victim blindfold and secure, from the very temple of salvation down to destruction.

Fear, fellow-sinners, fear the fatal spell. It is on you; and makes you deaf to the voice of Truth, and closes the ear of mercy to your prayer!

*Here is a danger to which our friendships may expose us.* Our friends are those, ordinarily, who are satisfied with us as we are: then they never will humble us. Every look, every word, every action continues the flattery. So much morality and so much religion as we have, they have practically pronounced sufficient to recommend us to them. Then it is difficult to realize that God's judgment is totally different from theirs; and yet, until we do, we shall content ourselves with pleasing them, and slumber into the second death.

*Here is the danger of prosperity.* Ease, success,

enjoyment, the good opinion of others ; what an atmosphere to surround our poor deluded souls ! Who can break through the enchanted circle and sit down alone to survey candidly, and as before the Searcher of hearts, his own deep defects, and recall his many and aggravated sins ! Dangerous ease ; dangerous success ! A great blessing ; but how easily abused, how easily turned into a curse ! Be not dismayed if God breaks up that ease and enjoyment ; if your pleasant gourd withers : it may be well for you.

*Here is the danger of any form of false religion.* One class of false religious systems degrades the soul. Every pagan system gives low conceptions of the Deity, of our duties to him, and of true human excellence. The Papal religion is thoroughly debasing in its tendency. It crushes individuality and reason ; it enslaves the will to an earthly authority ; it satisfies the conscience with puerile rites, and a low standard of personal excellence.

All others flatter human nature. They make their followers Pharisees. None but the Gospel truly humbles the human heart. They are the offspring of man's proud heart ; this came from God. On this point the human heart has taken its stand, and here the battle is to be fought.

Are you degraded by sin from your original lofty position ; or can you claim to stand with the sons of God ? That is the first great question.

If you are conscious of being degraded and ruined by sin, then will you take the place, in your own estimation, which you have in God's ? You say your sins are very few and small. That is the crime of Pharisaism added to all the rest. Adam's sin was but one, and,



in human eyes, small. If you analyze it, it was either a mere amiable yielding to his conjugal affections, or ambition, or curiosity, or a love of what tastes agreeably. Will you then weigh sin in your balances, or in those of heaven and its eternal Judge !

One other appeal. Will you sue for mercy ; God's mercy ; mercy through an atoning Saviour ; mercy on you, a miserable, perishing sinner !

Beware of a flattery that will ruin your soul, come from whence it may ; for even the Devil can appear as an angel of light when it suits his malignant purpose. Jesus says, learn of me ; what ? to be great ; to work miracles ? No ; to be meek and lowly. False religions say,—learn of me how good you are, how slight a change is needed for your salvation. Beware of a mistake as to the mode and ground of justification. Pharisaism is the natural mode, the agreeable mode ; but it is not God's way. “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Where are you seeking justification ; through *your* merits, or through Christ's ? Are you asking for justice or mercy ? Are you recounting to God your virtues, or your sins ?

Return once more to this scene. It was described for the sake of them that trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Pride trusts in itself, that it is so righteous ; that it does not deserve God's wrath, nor need his forgiving mercy. And it despises them who do need it. Is that Pharisee here to-day ? See him in prayer ; see him going down to his house, justified in his own eyes, but condemned by the Saviour of sinners, the Lord of glory.

Are you a sinner needing mercy ? Take your own place ; plead the sinner's plea ; and you will then be

justified immediately ; and will go down to your house justified, to death and eternity, justified. Remember, that without humility you cannot enter heaven. Humility is lovely ; God loves it. He dwells in the high and lofty place, yet will he come and make his abode in the humble heart. It dignifies any station ; it will shine in heaven, without knowing that it shines. Pride is the curse of our miserable race. It is an adamantine chain that will bind to misery and despair.



## LECTURE X.

### THE IMPORTUNATE FRIEND AND THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW; OR, IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER PREVALENT.

LUKE XI. 5-13; and XVIII. 1-8. “And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him: And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?’

“And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith, And shall not God avenge his own elect,

which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

OUR Saviour having furnished his disciples an abstract and outline of prayer, proceeds to give them some instruction about its spirit. These two parables before us agree in design, although delivered under different circumstances. That of the unjust judge refers to the tremendous trials and afflictions through which the Church is called to pass, even up to the time of Christ's final coming. In both there is an argument founded on the complete and infinite contrast between God and these two men.

He leads us to contemplate human nature as it is too often exhibited, either in its selfish indifference or its more positive injustice; reluctantly yielding to an untiring urgency, simply because not yielding would be more uncomfortable than yielding. With this he holds in clear contrast the conduct of our heavenly Father when he delays to answer our prayers. The state of mind he designs to meet by these parables is that of discouragement. And he furnishes to his people, during that painful season of delay in the answer to prayer, the strong ground of encouragement to expect an answer in the best way, and at the best time.

There are, in fact, three cases set before us; that in their light we may see the strong ground of our confidence in prayer; that of an unjust judge; a friend of ordinary goodness; and a father as good as the best.

These parables then show us that earnestness and perseverance in prayer characterize those who believe the Gospel; and especially they vindicate that perse-



verance, by showing why we may expect that *God will yield to argument and persuasion.*

The first consideration presented is—

I. BECAUSE HE IS A BEING POSSESSED OF AN INFINITELY PERFECT REASON ; or, in other words, is infinitely reasonable.

We are not now to discuss the reason of his delays in answering prayer ; but simply to show why we believe that reasoning and persuasion have any effect on him, inducing him to answer prayer. In the cases of the friend and the judge there are both delay and repulse ; but, finally, an answer. Now they yield to importunity simply as an importunity. It was not benevolence, not a right estimate of his friend's necessities that induced the man to rise and supply his wants. It seems to have been mere shame. There was a reason why he should arise and give his friend the bread. But that reason did not affect him ; it was merely the importunity that moved him. So too the judge ought to have been influenced by the reasons which the injured plaintiff brought before him. But, by his own avowal, he was not. He yielded, too, simply to selfishness ; wishing to avoid an importunity which was annoying to him, and which he saw he could avoid in no other way.

Now the character of God stands in infinite contrast with that ; and to appreciate it, we must see what prayer is ; who the suppliant is ; on what ground he appears there, and what is his suit ; or, in other words, notice the reasonableness of our petitions, and the peculiar mediation through which our prayer is offered.

1. *Prayer is the presentation of wants which God*

*acknowledges to be real and important.* Concerning even what may be considered as the very lowest of our necessities, the Saviour says: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of them." And he has taught us to insert in our daily prayer the mention of our daily bread. When therefore we present our bodily wants before him, we present the fact that we need for the preservation of our lives, and the continuation of our faculties in such a condition as to make them answer their ends, various things which are totally beyond our power to create or even to procure, without God's aid. This necessity and this dependence are therefore reasons why our heavenly Father should be moved by our requests for temporal blessings. But you may be disposed to inquire here,—why need he wait for our requests at all; and especially, why wait for us to become importunate? Though uttered in one breath, you will observe there are here two distinct inquiries; and a closer attention may show that they are more important than we always realize them to be, even when proposing them. We may not now pause to examine them fully; but we may have occasion presently to show some of the designs of attaching special blessings to importunity in prayer. And concerning the wisdom and kindness of God in making prayer necessary for the procuring many blessings, it stands precisely on a footing with the employment of human skill, foresight, and industry in every department of life. Suppose men to be as averse to labor as they are to prayer; it would then appear to them just as wise to say, "why need we plough, or study, or traffic, or work in any way with head or hand,"—as it is to say, why need we pray? Could not God furnish us every



good thing without all this employment of our poor powers? Yes; if you speak of mere omnipotence, he could. But if you mean either to inquire whether he has done so, or whether it were more kind and wise in him to do so, we answer promptly, and to be heard to the ends of the earth and to the end of time—No. Conceding then the fact of the arrangement, and its wisdom, that man shall secure some good things only by prayer; and that nothing gotten without prayer shall prove to him a real blessing, we return to the inquiry, why God is moved by argument and persuasion? And our answer now is—because he is reasonable. Our bodily wants are reasons to affect a wise and kind Providence. So are our spiritual necessities. They are all met by the one blessing of which the Lord speaks in the 13th verse, when saying, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!” Give the Holy Spirit? what an expression. Give God; that person of the Deity whose special office it is to enlighten, to purify, to console, to strengthen, to transform man’s spiritual nature! It was he who made Saul of Tarsus become Paul the apostle. It was he who breathed on the dead nations of Asia and Europe, and brought upon them a new life, out of which has come all that is good, strong, lovely, progressive in modern Christianity and modern society. It was he who wrought mightily in the vulgar, profane, ignorant John Bunyan, to make him the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*; in the reckless, cruel slave-trader John Newton, to raise him up from the half-savage life of an Englishman living among the slave factories of Western Africa, to make of him one of England’s brightest ornaments, a pillar in her Church on earth,

an heir of God's eternal glory in heaven. It is he, of whom it is said that his products in the human heart are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Now when a man comes before God to ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit thus to enlighten and transform and bless him, there is an infinite reasonableness in his petition, and, of course, a consideration to affect the mind of God to grant his request. The same may be said concerning all the other legitimate objects of prayer; all our own wants, bodily and spiritual; the wants of our families, friends, neighbors, enemies; those of the Church, of the nation, of the human race. It is reasonable in us to desire these blessings; it is reasonable in us to resort to our Creator, the giver of all good; it is reasonable, when for reasons which satisfy him, he delays his answer, that we spread out the case with its facts, and its most moving aspects, because we are dealing with a mind, whose nature and operations we can understand only through our own; and it is reasonable in him to be affected by these considerations, and to act in view of them.

But prayer is more than this. Christ has taught us the Christian method of prayer. "Without me ye can do nothing; whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it." By these and similar declarations, and the whole doctrine of the priesthood of Christ, we learn that,

2. *Prayer is a plea offered in the name of God's dear Son. Prayer must be offered by a believer in the mediation of Christ; and must be an expression of faith in him.* The meaning of this is, that God having revealed to man his guilty and helpless condition by



nature, and the wondrous provision made for his salvation through Christ, he that comes to God must come intelligently apprehending and cordially approving this arrangement. In other words, he must pray in the name of Christ, as one believing in him with all the heart. Now, when one comes thus before God to ask for things which God knows to be very important, this is a reason why he should favorably regard the suppliant, and grant him his request; though, for other equally good reasons, he bear long with him, or keep him in the posture of waiting. Our taking that attitude, and meeting him on the platform of his own construction; meeting him in the way that honors all his attributes, that confirms the stability of his government, that makes it glorious for him to receive and bless sinful man; that is a reason why he should accept our petitions, and grant our requests. And there is another equally solid:

## II. HE IS A BEING POSSESSED OF AN INFINITE AND INFINITELY PERFECT SYMPATHY.

This is one of the difficult points of theology. The plain reader of the Bible gets along without experiencing the difficulty. He reads an expression like this, uttered by an infinite Being, when expressing to the Jews the effects of their conduct on his feelings: "Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed, that is full of sheaves;" and he simply gets the idea that God felt as an earthly father would feel at such ungrateful treatment from his children. Thus far it is well; and he has learned exactly what God designed to teach. But now he becomes a student of the whole Bible, and endeavors to reduce its teachings to har-

mony and unity. Then occurs a difficulty. God is unchangeable ; how is that to be reconciled with feelings ever fluctuating from grief to joy, and delight to sadness ? God is perfectly happy ; how reconcile that with the pains of sympathy, anger, hatred, and regret ? Here is a real difficulty ; and there are several ways of disposing of it. One is, to clothe the Eternal with the weaknesses of man. Another is, to evaporate these expressions of sorrow and sympathy into empty sounds. The right position I judge to be this : hold firmly to the majesty, unchangeableness and blessedness of the Most High God. Then separating from human affections every thing that is imperfect and limited, every thing that is sinful or a judicial consequence of sin, and ascribe it without hesitation, without reserve to Him, wherever the Scriptures speak of his exercising love, hatred, repentance, wrath, grief, or self-denial.

In this view then we may regard the man Christ Jesus as revealing the Godhead ; and the divine nature of Christ as having the title of the Word. We see God in the babe, the boy, the man, the son, the friend, the preacher, the healer, the weeper, the suppliant, the victim.

And now when you approach Him on his throne of grace, you may understand that “as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him.” That is,

1. *He is tenderly affected by our distresses.* “His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Our miseries then are in themselves arguments, most eloquent pleaders. And whatever may be the reason for a delay in answering our prayers, they are a sufficient reason for his



answering, when the reason for delay exists no longer. And there is nothing in the greatness of his Being or attributes which makes it unreasonable that he should be so affected.

Now let us observe an instance of prayer under affliction ; earnest, logical, bold and eloquent, because sincere and simple. Israel had so grievously provoked the indignation of Jehovah, that he threatened to exterminate them. When Moses heard it, he came before the mercy-seat ; and this was his plea : “ And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear *it*, for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them ; and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land : *for* they have heard that thou Lord *art* among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, and *that* thy cloud standeth over them, and *that* thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now *if* thou shalt kill *all* this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” And the Lord said, “ I have pardoned, according to thy word.” Here is a specimen of prayer ;

an appeal to the reason and the sympathy of Jehovah. And it was successful, because he is reasonable and compassionate. His own glory is a sufficient reason for his acting; and the sorrows of his people, and especially their nobler sorrows, like that here expressed, reach his heart.

And not only our sorrows in themselves affect him, but more particularly . . .

2. *Our utterance of them.* So our sympathies are affected. Distress in itself moves our compassion; but our interest is greatly increased when the sufferer turns his eye to us, and addresses his complaints and petitions to one of us alone. And it is worthy of our God, that praying sorrow should affect him more than sorrow venting itself in idle exclamations or rebellious murmurings; and still more that he should be most moved by the sorrow that lies patient, but pleading at his footstool, determined to go nowhere else for relief. Thus Jesus revealed the divine compassion when the woman of Syrophenicia importuned him.

We find a climax in the three cases now before us. There is an unrighteous, hard-hearted magistrate, who avows to himself that he neither fears God, nor regards man. He yields neither to the reasonableness of the woman's demand, though placed in his station to administer justice, nor to the urgent sorrows of an injured widow. But at length mere importunity overcomes him. And did *he* answer prayer; and shall not God the righteous and compassionate Father yield to our importunate cries! But the next case is of a friend, a man who had some regard for the suppliant. And will he at length yield to urgency alone; and shall not God, our friend, who delays, not from selfishness or indif-



ference, but from infinitely higher considerations, shall not he, when those considerations cease to exist, yield to our urgent prayer? The next is a father, who could not mock the misery of his children, nor refuse them sustenance. What then shall we say of our heavenly Father; “will he not avenge” or do justice for his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, will he not much more give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him! Yes, heaven and earth may pass away, but his loving kindness cannot fail.

There is yet another reason why God is moved by our importunity.

### III. HE IS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD.

This consideration includes the others. He promises to hear and answer prayer, because he is reasonable and good. He was free in making these promises; but, having made them, they are an additional reason for his answering our supplications. And hence they who have learned to pray, urge this as a valid and most weighty plea, “remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.”

His promises are such as these: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it; ask, and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Now in these and all the other promises concerning prayer, there is no limitation of the time or manner of the gift. And on no point do we make more serious mistakes than on this; fixing dates where infinite wisdom has put none, and prescribing modes where sovereign goodness would be left free. We cannot hold the Promiser to our times and ways,—only to the substance of his promise. It

often happens that the time of the answer does not coincide with that of the petition. But a time of answering must come ; and Jehovah will keep his word, let what will fail. And the promise which we hold before him is a sufficient reason for his acting when the fulness of time has come.

God would then present himself to us, as a hearer of prayer, in comparison and contrast with man as the hearer of prayer. He is reasonable, ever and infinitely ; but man is sometimes unmoved by the strongest reasons ; never exactly affected as he should be by facts and principles. A judge may be unjust, and suffer might to triumph over right ; but God will avenge his own elect, though he bear long with their sorrow and their importunity. A friend may be narrow-hearted and reluctant to put himself to inconvenience ; but God is full of kindness and sympathy. And the kindest father is imperfect ; and if he cannot give his son a stone for bread, how much more impossible is it that God our heavenly Father should withhold from us any thing that we ask, which he knows is for our good and our ultimate happiness ! There may be in him a seeming unwillingness to answer us, as in the case of Jacob and the Syrophenician woman. In the judge and the friend it was real reluctance ; in him it is but seeming.

*We should then fully reconcile our minds to delays in receiving answers to prayer. What is God doing while we are pleading, with tears and strong supplication ; is he forgetting us ? No. Is he indifferent to our sorrows ? No. Has he failed to remember his promise ? No. He is all the while regarding us with*



complacency ; feeling the force of every appeal ; rightly appreciating every fact. But sometimes he is aiming at making prayer a part of our discipline. His providence is ever training us by difficulties. To fix the eye on some great end, and set the soul to the attainment of it, and holding it there through every embarrassment, that makes all true greatness. Cotton Mather remarks : “it is best that you should be content with the ordinary satisfaction of praying, and so waiting for the blessings of God in such pious resignations to his will and annihilations of your own, as an uncertainty about issues would most properly lead you to.” Sometimes the cause of delay is in ourselves ; and the search must be instituted there, until the embarrassing cause is removed.

Always these delays promote our more intimate returns to God. And we find the very sorrow that drove us to him, to have become thus the source of our highest joy. Communion with our heavenly Father is itself the purest of enjoyments, and the richest of blessings.

These delays greatly strengthen our confidence in God. Faith grows when its energies are called into exercise. Jacob became a prince by this kind of conflict. It is a great benefit too to be forced upon a more thorough study of faith, prayer, promises, the covenant and the mediator. How precious, at such times when pressed with our own burdens and wearied with long delays, the examples in the Scriptures seem ! Abraham’s importunity, when pleading for Sodom ; Moses for Israel ; David for himself !

*The holy art of prayer is to be learned.* And no attainment is of greater importance. To learn to reason

with God, and to persuade him ! what can be more important ? Perhaps the most essential rules that have been given are these :

Depend on the Holy Spirit, for he is our strength in this holy exercise.

Study the Scriptures to know the whole mind of God on this subject.

Study Providence ; or, see events in the light of God's presence.

Cherish the desires and feelings that God approves.

Observe the answers to prayer.

Practise prayer ; earnest, importunate prayer.

Get on the right ground with God, so that you may know yourself to be one of his "elect," whom "he will avenge."

*Become earnest in prayer.* If you are indifferent or lukewarm, awake and contemplate your situation, your wants. "*Ask.*" There are your wants, there is your helper, and there the mercy-seat. Be in earnest there, rather than in any other place or employment. "*Cry*"—moan—you shall obtain.

"*Seek.*" Diligence is here enjoined, such as makes men seek for office, money, health, or education. Let nothing hinder your praying ; nothing in heaven, earth or hell. Pray, pray at all times, everywhere ; keep your wants, your sorrows, your cares, your business, your joys, your fears before God. You cannot burden, weary or distract him. Nothing is too minute for him who numbers the hairs of your head ; nothing too vast for him who spread the heavens as a curtain. "That soul," says Donne, "that is accustomed to direct herself to God upon every occasion ; that, as a flower at sun-rising, conceives a sense of God in every beam of



his, and spreads and dilates itself toward him in thankfulness for every small blessing that he sheds upon her, . . . that soul who, whatsoever string be stricken in her, bass or treble, her high or low estate, is ever turned towards God, that soul prays sometimes when it does not know that it prays." But then it must be too a prayer which so lays hold upon your heart that you will know you pray, and know that you never did any thing so earnestly.

"*Knock.*" There may be a long painful season between the beginning and the ceasing of your prayer for some particular blessing; but that may be the brightest season of your life to review from heaven, for we shall there see that our trials in time, bear the sweetest fruit in eternity. The answer may come *slowly*, as our feelings judge it; but he calls it *speedily*. It is so measured by God's existence, God's plans, and our eternity.

"When then the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth!" Are your desires reasonable, benevolent, scriptural? If so, then pray and believe.

## LECTURE XI.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN ; OR, KINDNESS.

LUKE x : 30-37.—“ And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way ; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was ; and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, and went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him : and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves ? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

THIS man appears to have commenced his inquiry in an entirely sincere spirit. But, as in other cases, the Lord did not leave him until he had searched his heart, and showed him where he failed to meet the law of God. He had gone beyond his countrymen, and even the most of their religious teachers, in discovering the true spirit of the law of Moses ; that it inculcates, not merely formal services, but love to God ; and not mere-



ly that, but also love to man. When the Saviour replied to his inquiry what he must do to inherit eternal life, by proposing another; "What is written in the law; how readest thou?" he answered; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and thy neighbor as thyself." Then said the Saviour; "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live." From the remark now made by the lawyer, it is manifest that the direct and simple reply of the Saviour had awakened his conscience. He saw himself condemned by the law whose authority and righteousness he admitted. One of two courses then remained for him; repentance, or self-vindication. He chose the latter. And he undertook to accomplish it by presenting an ambiguity in the law; "And who is my neighbor?"

The question is here beautifully answered. A Jew is travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho; a journey, at that time, full of peril. The road is through a rocky wilderness, abounding in deep defiles, sharp turnings in the road; and indeed every facility is there, to aid the work of robbery. And it is said by Josephus, that Herod having recently dismissed 40,000 workmen from the temple, a large part of them became highway robbers. This traveller fell into the hands of such men; who stripped him of money and garments, wounded him, and abandoned him to die. His thoughts would of course be as great a source of anguish as his wounds. His property gone, his business interrupted; in a terrible wilderness; his family held in painful suspense; his wounds open to the heat of day, and cold of night; no physician, no friend at hand; what could he expect but death; and that, in the most painful form? But he is not left alone. "There comes another traveller;

it is a priest of God. Ah, here is relief; one of my own country and religion. He will pity me and befriend me." No, he passes "by on the other side." It is said that 12,000 priests at one time resided in Jericho. He came "by chance." He had probably been fulfilling his course at the temple, and was now returning home. If "by chance" means only to represent our view of the case, we cannot object to it. But it is liable to perversion, and to convey the impression that God is not weaving the great web of human events. It was He that put this needy man where the richer could help or neglect him, as they should prefer. It is not chance to him, that they meet this sufferer. Then came a Levite; a man of the same tribe; but of one of the inferior branches; yet also a minister of religion. He saw the poor perishing man, but passed on, as if it were no concern of his. The priests and Levites were ministers of religious worship, and interpreters of the law. They had in their law not only the general requirement to love their neighbor; but also this; "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again." If they must raise up his fallen beast, out of pure charity; much more, himself. Now, as the narrative had advanced thus far, the lawyer had perceived only a confirmation of his own views, that ceremonial piety is not all that the law requires; indeed, is not any thing, without charity. But he must have felt an electric shock, when the great teacher introduced the next character in the scene. We can indeed scarcely estimate, at this distant place and period, the elevated position which our Lord occupied as a teacher and expounder of law; and the tremen-



dous power of his eloquence, when he introduces a Samaritan into this scene. We need not here enter into the question dividing the learned; whether the Samaritans were of totally Pagan, or partly Jewish origin. It is enough to know that they were excommunicated from the Jewish Church; their name was a by-word of contempt; they were allowed no intercourse with the Jews; and they equally hated the Jews. And yet Christ, a Jew, teaching Jews and Jewish doctors; after showing the cold and cruel selfishness of eminent Jews, brings in a Samaritan as possessed of humanity enough to pity a distressed man; which they had not; of nobleness of soul sufficient to help even a Jew; of a love so strong and tender, that he treated his enemy just as he would like to be treated in similar circumstances! This simple story comes with the weight of a divine command; with the light of a beam from heaven; settling for ever the principle that all morality, benevolence and piety consist in so loving God, as to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The question then returns: "Who is my neighbor?" The answer is here given.

#### I. IT IS NOT MERELY ONE OF MY KINDRED.

There was here no other known relationship than that which begins back at the point where all our genealogical lines meet, that great root which bears us all; Adam, or Noah. There is indeed a special claim of kindred upon us. But the most perfect respect to that claim only the better fits us to meet the broader claims of humanity.

#### II. IT IS NOT MERELY MY FRIEND.

These men were utter strangers to each other. And

the Samaritan did not require that he should be one of those whose congeniality of tastes or pursuits should have brought and bound them together. He was a stranger; but he was a man. The law does not mean by neighbor,

### III. ONE OF MY CHURCH.

There are strong affinities occasioned by harmony of belief on the great points of religious doctrine and duty. Church fellowship is a blessed tie, and involves peculiar duties. But it has no tendency to prevent humanity, kindness to men of other faith and other worship than our own. The faith and worship of these two men were not only different from one another, but arrayed in rival claims and intense hostility. Nor,

### IV. ARE THE DISTINCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTY ADMITTED HERE.

Every man in a State ought to have some political creed. And if other men agree with him, they are a party, unless all men agree with them. And there may be such a thing as a wise, candid, kind attachment to your own party, which shall in no way interfere with perfect benevolence to men of other parties. Nor are

### V. NATIONAL DIFFERENCES RECOGNIZED HERE.

These men were of different and rival nations. Yet the one discharged to the other the duties of benevolence. If the object of benevolent regard is in any way limited by this parable to any thing narrower than the whole circle of the human race, that limit is found, not in physical differences, geographical positions, political



alliances, or religious convictions; not in any thing personal or permanent, but in the mere accident of proximity. My neighbor (which, etymologically considered, means, next to me), as interpreted by the parable, signifies, the human being whom Providence places within the reach of my sympathies and beneficence. But that Providence is, by its wondrous arrangement, diminishing the distances between men, and bringing every case of sorrow beneath the eye of charity, and every case of weakness within the reach of the stronger arm.

Many content themselves with admiring this beautiful story. But we have more serious interest in it than that. Our first duty is to see in it an exhibition of God's holy law. That law is at utter enmity with the pride of the heart, as well as its selfishness. Pride is a strong purpose of soul to exalt itself. To make this appear reasonable; and so, maintain self-respect, and keep a high place in the respect of others, it seizes on all that distinguishes self as superior to others. This is the source of much that is called patriotism. There is a patriotism perfectly consistent with a world-wide charity; just as there is a love of one's family consistent with patriotism. But when one desires to find occasion to justify contempt or indifference toward men of another nation, his patriotism is disguised selfishness. Some men are proud of their families. That one should take an interest in the history of his ancestors; that he should be peculiarly pleased with their greatness or goodness, is natural, proper, and commendable. But there is an easy entrance to pride there. And it may always be known by this effect, that it fosters a

sense of personal superiority, and justifies contempt and indifference towards others. There is too a pride of talents, wealth, and attainments, which is totally contrary to the love of our neighbor. Equally so are the prejudices of party and sect. The Jews called the Samaritans Cuthites, idolaters who worshipped the image of a dove; cursed them publicly in the synagogue; prayed that they might have no portion in the resurrection of life; denied the validity of their testimony; denounced him who should receive a Samaritan into his house; affirmed that to eat a morsel of his fare, was to eat swine's flesh; and would rather suffer any evil, than to be indebted to him for a favor. Such is party-prejudice. And to this hateful spirit in all its forms the pure law of God is opposed. Charity is not the confounding of truth and error; does not require you to believe that black is white because your neighbor thinks so; charity does not require you to think that your neighbor's erroneous opinions on religious subjects are harmless to himself or to others. But it does forbid you to entertain toward his person any other than kind feelings; and it requires you cordially to promote his welfare.

See it illustrated in the case of this Samaritan. He pitied the afflicted. The others did not. Human distress as such they did not regard. No matter how much, nor of what kind existed, provided it left them and their friends unharmed, they cared not for it. But charity makes another's suffering so far its own, as to do for the removal of them what it consistently can. And in this work charity is self-sacrificing. This man gave not words nor tears, but time, labor and money; and, by tarrying in the wilderness, exposed himself to the same



treatment which this man had received from the robbers. He came to the wretched man, examined the extent of the injury done him ; bound up his wounds, perhaps with parts of his own garments ; poured into his wounds the remedy then in common use in popular surgery ; set him on his own beast ; brought him to an inn ; and there nursed him. That is charity in Heathen or Christian, Jew or Samaritan. And it stops not there. To gentleness and kindness, it adds thoroughness. He pays the expense of entertaining the invalid, leaves him in the care of the landlord, and pledges to pay all other expenses that may be incurred until he shall be able to take care of himself. This is the forethought of charity. It seems to say to the landlord : if this poor man should express any anxieties about the expense, just say to him, “ that is all provided for, put your mind entirely at ease.” Oh how strong is this exhibition of kindness to this Jew, when he comes to know the whole case. He is dying in a wilderness. A priest of his own church comes near him, sees him, and turns away from him. A Levite does the same. Then comes a Samaritan ; yes, a Samaritan, and does all this ! If ever a man was converted from selfishness, pride and prejudice, to love blessed charity, surely that man was.

“ The law is holy ; the commandment holy, and just, and good.” But who can stand before it ? It requires charity. But there is not a soul of us, that has not broken its sacred bonds. It requires us first not to injure our neighbor in his property, his feelings, his health, his piety, his good name. Who can say : I have not sinned ? It requires compassion for the afflicted, though he be wicked, obscure, an enemy. It requires self-sacrifice for his good. Then it goes forth,

and requires that we love him as we love ourselves. How is it then that any man avoids being brought to a conviction of sin by that holy law? How could this priest, and this Levite, satisfy themselves that they were going to heaven; and how do men now satisfy themselves on this momentous point, when none of us can be justified by this law; even in the second table, its subordinate part? It is by various delusions. One is, the acquirement of a conventional benevolence, which consists in a general kind feeling towards men; contributing money sometimes to the poor, and supporting public charities. Wherein then is it deficient? In leaving self at last to be the object of supreme regard. Some neighbors may be loved; but no one is loved as self is loved. Fellow subjects of God's holy kingdom, stop here and look; for you may get conviction enough there to save your souls. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." You may so qualify the requirement as to neutralize it; you may shrink from the holy light that shines in it; you may adopt some other standard, but you cannot say that you have always loved your neighbor as yourself, and that you do now! But if you do not, you are lost by the law. Do not deceive your soul. The law is revealed in its purity, on purpose to make you know and condemn yourself. You must love as this Samaritan did; love all men; so that like God, you can seek their happiness, while you hate their characters; so that like Christ, you can sacrifice yourself for your enemies. You say: this is requiring too much; then it is requiring too much on your part to ask God to take you to heaven; for this is holiness, and, without holiness, no man can see the Lord.

There is a conventional propriety with which men



satisfy their consciences ; which satisfy society ; and therefore, they think God ought to be satisfied. There is a conventional morality, which satisfies men. But it is all external ; it has no love. It is all negative ; it does nothing for the good of others ; but merely abstains from certain forms of evil. Even a heathen could say : “ I am a man, and interested in every thing that affects mankind. But our Christian morality is often far short of that. There is a conventional religion which satisfies some men. By this I mean some connection with a Church ; some acts of private and public worship ; some attachment to religious notions which passes with the person for piety ; but at the same time, he has not charity. Now his religion will be his ruin, if he perseveres in being just as pious as he has been ; and in the same way. The priest and the Levite thought a great deal of their Church, as the Church established by God. And they were members of it, held in good repute. But they did not love their neighbor. No doubt they had very satisfactory reasons to their own consciences for treating that man as they did. But they did not satisfy Christ. So he has held them up as a spectacle to the universe, of men that had a religion which satisfied themselves, but which could not save their souls.

“ By the law shall no flesh be justified ; for, by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

*Here we see the beauty of the Gospel.* It abates not a tittle of the law ; but holds up its pure ideal, its perfect standard above all conventional moralities ; above all human character, attainments and excellencies. It suffers the law to show us the deformity of our hearts

and lives. It enforces this too, by presenting Christ in contrast with man. And there is even a deep revelation of Christ in this parable ; for he acted forth charity as no creature ever can. We were robbed, beaten, bleeding, and perishing. And this kind stranger came to the wilderness where we were dying, and saw us, and had compassion. He undertook our case. He healed our wounds by a balm which was extracted from his own broken heart. He put us in a place of safety, provided for our wants ; and all, at his own charges. He died for his enemies, and prayed for his enemies. In the contrast of our spirit and life with his, we see our own deformity. Then the Gospel shows us how we can obtain forgiveness, though we have so failed of our duty. But it is never by abolishing the law, or by diminishing our respect for it. “What is written in the law ; how readest thou ?” was Christ’s first reply to the inquiry ; “What must I do to inherit eternal life ?” You must obey the law, is his first answer. So he answered the young ruler. Now he did not believe that either of them had obeyed the law. But conviction of sin is the first step. Then, when we are humbled and penitent, it shows us forgiveness and sanctification through Christ. He is “made unto us sanctification.” By loving him we become like him ; by communing with him, we are changed into his likeness ; by prayer we receive his Spirit, who changes our vile hearts that they may be like unto his heart, as he will change hereafter, our “vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.”

*This Parable leads us to a favorable position from whence to look at War ; whether employed as a trade,*



*as an amusement, as an instrument of revenge, or of ambition.* The legitimate sphere of War is defence against robbers and tyrants. Every nation ought to show that it has a magistracy which beareth the sword not in vain, though in the fear of the Lord ; a magistracy which is a terror to evil-doers, both at home and abroad. But to make war to gratify a desire of revenge is murder on a large scale, just as it is murder for one man to kill another from motives of revenge. When a nation has been insulted by another, or injured in its commerce or its citizens, war is neither good policy, nor good religion. Remonstrance is the first resort. Try that patiently, calmly and thoroughly. If that is unavailing, appeal to the tribunal of human justice, the conscience of mankind. If that brings no acknowledgment, withdraw from the fellowship of that nation, and tell the world your reasons. It will cost you less money than war ; and an immeasurable wear and tear of conscience will be saved. But to fight for an insult will involve immeasurable evils. You hurt yourself if you rejoice in your success. You injure the innocent of your own and of the enemy's people. You are sure to do wrong, because you cannot measure how much mischief and suffering the insult demands, nor how much you inflict. You cannot be the kind Samaritan ; for, after shooting down your enemies, it will be a strange operation to go and pity them, and take care of them, as he did.

We might say similar things of wars for annexation, for the balance of power ; and of war as a trade. A Hungarian officer was appointed to command the Cuban expedition. A friend warned him against it. " I know it is bad," says he ; " but my countrymen are

warriors by trade, and I must give them employment ! ” That is more worthy of the infernal regions, than of this earth, so visited by heavenly mercy.

*The Parable reaches the subjects of the slavery-codes and slavery-extension.* I join no body of men on any side of this subject, because on such subjects men are very apt to think and speak for you, or to excommunicate you for an opinion. I speak on it in the fear of no man, but of my Judge ; for I am accountable to God supremely, and very subordinately to men and parties, South or North. I speak, then, as a minister of Christ’s Gospel, of the laws, the grave, dignified, approved laws which lie on the statute-books of free and independent States, of which they are not ashamed, but in which they glory ; for speaking of which, they cannot accuse any man of unfriendliness or fanaticism. These laws make man a chattel. He has no will of his own in regard to the kind or degree of labor he shall perform, the person he shall serve, the place he shall inhabit, the degree of personal improvement he shall obtain. He has no right to the fruits of his labor ; he has no right to marry for life ; he cannot educate, nor locate his children ; he cannot leave them any thing by will ; he cannot enter his house, and say, this is my castle ; he is deprived of all these natural and inalienable rights by law, as if he were a criminal and a prisoner, having forfeited them to the State.

Now I have no angry disputes with any man ; I hold to the constitution, and the compromise, and I love the slave-holder and the slave ; but I say, the Samaritan of this parable would never have made such a law ; nor claimed any such rights, if he had been born under



it. And it is not love to his neighbor that reconciles any man to it ; much less so is the desire to introduce the same selfishness to territories yet unsoiled by such legislation, yet unblighted by such an institution. And so I find good men reasoning in the slave-holding States.

*This Parable illustrates the missionary enterprise.* The Son of God came to save a fallen race. To deny that any portion of our race need his salvation, is, to pour contempt on his person, his mission, his word, and his sacrifice. Now many that affect to consider themselves as having attained to the perfect conception of charity, ridicule the attempt to make Christ and his salvation known to the people that have not known him. This is acting over again the part of the priest and the Levite. No matter what their pretensions, whether to morality, or piety, or charity, they “pass by, on the other side,” denying that their neighbor is in want ; or leaving him to the mercies of a benevolent Creator, just as their prototypes did in the wilderness between Jericho and Jerusalem. “It is a shame,” we sometimes hear them cry, “to sacrifice such valuable lives among savages.” Yet some of these are friends of war ; some approve of Sir John Franklin’s expedition. But be they who they may ; however great their wisdom in their own estimation, or in that of admiring friends, the Saviour teaches us, that a self-sacrificing benevolence for the benefit of the suffering and perishing, is the fulfilling of the second table of the law ; is the true wisdom, goodness and greatness of man ; and shows by his own example that true charity will carry the Gospel to those destitute of it, at any personal sacrifice.

*This Parable shows us why the world is in confusion.* Selfishness is the source of our misery. It made these robbers miserable. It made this traveller miserable. It prevented these religious men from being happy. And benevolence made the Samaritan noble and happy, comforted the traveller, and has furnished a beautiful picture and a valuable lesson for every generation of men.

*This Parable shows what will constitute the essence and blessedness of the millennium and of heaven ; piety toward God, and benevolence to men.*



## LECTURE XII.

### THE RELENTLESS SERVANT; OR, THE SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS.

MATT. XVIII. 21-35. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

OUR Lord's remarks concerning discipline by the Church, led Peter to inquire how often we must forgive

one who offends us. He was acquainted undoubtedly with the Jewish rule of forgiving an offender three times. But he had perceived that Christ's precepts inculcated something in advance of that. He therefore put it at seven times, as in his estimation, certainly going as far as could be required of human nature. "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him ; till seven times ? Jesus saith unto him ; I say not unto thee, Until seven times : but, Until seventy times seven ;" that is, without limit. To enforce this, the parable we are to consider is related.

The scope of this parable is very obvious. Its force lies in an appeal to the natural reason of mankind ; but the main fact on which that appeal is founded is supernatural ; it is the free forgiveness of all our sins on a mere request, without rendering any equivalent. It is designed to urge on man the spirit and exercise of forgiveness, by the overwhelming considerations, that if we reach heaven it must be by a wonderful exercise of forbearance, mercy and forgiveness on the part of our Creator ; and that, if we have not a forgiving temper, we are not of those whom he will forgive.

It is very obvious from the various interpretations of this, as well as many others of the parables, that their force is destroyed by the application of false principles of interpreting. A parable is a species of analogical reasoning. Suppose I speak of Attila as an eagle rushing from the north upon the effeminate Roman empire, and seizing his prey, would it be a sound and sober exposition of my meaning to show that the Gothic conqueror had wings and feathers, and literally flew through the air ? or, if I speak of a child



as a budding rose, should the resemblance be carried to things where it does not hold? I merely meant to refer to the delightful impression which a child makes on my feelings when I see that daily unfolding of new physical and mental beauty; but one of these thorough interpreters shall make me describe a child with leaves and roots and thorns like a rose-bush. Let us be sober when we deal with God's word. The one great point of the parable before us is that which I have stated. But there are several false resemblances which the unskilful may fasten upon it. They may apply the parable to the subject of property. It would, however, make utter confusion to regard the subject of money-debt in the parable, at all in a literal sense. We owe God no such debt; he never remits any such debt; and the subject of property is touched here only in the most incidental way, in inculcating mercy where the rigorous exaction of our claims would be ruinous to our debtor. But that is entirely incidental to the Saviour's instruction here. He is speaking of moral debts, offences to our feelings; and of the inward remitting, the heart-forgiveness. Christ never required community of property. He never encouraged laxness in business, or required the industrious to encourage the indolent. "If any will not work, neither shall he eat," is the inspired rule on this subject. Our Lord never encouraged a laxness in business that would foster fraudulence, nor a mercy that would make us fools. He only requires us to adopt mercy in place of business principles, when we deal with unavoidable poverty; but that is not the duty he is here inculcating. In the parallel passage of the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," he does not make the

forgiveness of our sins by God to depend upon our not requiring men to pay us what they owe us.

Nor does the parable touch the matter of civil punishments. Christianity would be the enemy of human society, if its mighty influence were opposed to the punishment of crime. It forbids personal revenge, popular violence, and the perversion of governmental power to tyranny and oppression. But the defence of the public welfare by penal statutes, and the rigid execution of them, is approved in all the teachings of our Saviour and his apostles. The Christian view of rights is quite peculiar. It tells the poor to be quiet under the oppression of the mighty ; but it hurls thunderbolts at the heads of tyrants. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you." It bids the slave be faithful and contented for Christ's sake ; but it tells the master you have a master who will shortly examine your slave-code, and hold you to the exactest spirit of the rule, "what ye would that others should do to you, do ye also to them." It bids the Christian never to contend very violently for his civil rights ; but it throws the fires of hell in the face of him that presumes to violate those rights. "If a man smite thee on one cheek, turn the other," it says to the injured. But to the injurer it says : "What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor, saith the Lord God of hosts ?" Thus is the Gospel at once the promoter of personal piety ; of social order, and the stability and righteousness of governments.

Nor does this parable exhibit the history of a person in any of its characters, but illustrates a principle in each. One who denies the final perseverance of the



believer as an absolute certainty may say, here is a man forgiven, and then condemned. But even he would shrink from all the consequences of his own interpretation. He must then drop analogy, and take resemblance for his guide; and he will have God threatening to sell a man's wife and children to pay his debts; and he will have a man forgiven of God, when God sees that in his heart is an unforgiving temper; and he will, moreover, have a man seized and cast immediately into perdition, if he once become unduly angry after his conversion.

Nor does the parable teach that we are forgiven of God, because we forgive others. Unless you obtain a clear view of the distinction between the ground and the condition of forgiveness, you can never harmonize the various parts of the Bible. For instance, it is often said that we cannot be saved by the righteousness of the law. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." And yet again it is said, Abraham was justified by works. Mary is said to be forgiven because she loved much. There is no contradiction here; for the ground of all forgiveness is the atonement of Christ; "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." But repentance and faith are the conditions of salvation. And a thousand tests of these conditions are presented, that we may not be deceived. In James's day men had reached the antinomian ground of depending on a speculative belief in Christ. He declares that Abraham was justified by a living faith, a faith that works obedience. But this parable presents neither the ground of forgiveness, nor the condition of forgiveness; but one quality which must ever be found in that repentance and faith which secure forgiveness. We are

not taught to pray, “forgive *because* we forgive,” but *as* we forgive.

The doctrine of the parable then we may state in these terms :

*The spirit of forgiveness is indispensable to our being forgiven.* A forgiven sinner must forgive cordially. To enforce this principle a scene is introduced, in which the actors are an eastern king ; a satrap, or governor of a province ; an inferior officer ; many of his own rank ; and the jailers, here called tormentors or torturers, because they often put prisoners to the torture, either to force confession or induce their friends to release them. When this provincial governor’s accounts are rendered, it seems that he owes an immense sum, perhaps the revenues of many years from his province, accumulated in his hands and squandered. “Ten thousand talents” is undoubtedly in the Greek an indefinite, immense, immeasurable sum. Ten talents of silver would be \$17,100,000 ; and of gold, \$273,750,000. But the Greek word *myriad* best expresses it. When the king discovers the extent of his indebtedness, in Oriental style he commanded him to be sold, his wife, children, palaces, equipages, lands, and all his possessions. The affrighted debtor pleads for delay, with the promise of paying all. And to his surprise, the whole debt is cancelled. Going from the royal presence joyous and free, he is soon to have an opportunity of testing his spirit, whether it is generous and gentle like his sovereign’s ; whether such generosity as he has witnessed has suitably affected his own heart ; or whether all his joy is selfish, and his heart only hardened by goodness. He meets another officer, probably as much inferior to him as he was to the king, who



owed him fourteen dollars. Would you believe it! he was thrown into a rage, and seized the man as soon as he met him, taking him by the throat, saying, "pay me that thou owest." The poor debtor fell at his feet, and repeated the very prayer which this creditor had used. But he that had wept, was unmoved by tears; he that had prayed, disregarded prayer; he that was forgiven, would not forgive. He took the law in his hand, stood for his rights, cast the debtor into prison. This conduct grieved his fellow courtiers, who knew the whole history; and they carried their complaint to the king. His indignation was enkindled; he ordered the wretched man into his presence, and thus reprimanded him: "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredest me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" And he delivered him to the jailers to keep him in their dreadful hands until he should pay all his debt. It is striking that he calls him no severe name as a debtor; but says, in view of his selfishness and cruelty; "Oh thou wicked man!"

It now will complete our examination of this parable to observe

#### I. WHAT IT IS TO FORGIVE AN OFFENDING BROTHER.

Wrong-doing has several relations; one to the government of God. When one man injures another, he violates God's law. The injured party has nothing directly to do with that consequence of it. It may violate a law of society. With that he cannot interfere. There is an effect on the heart of the wrong-doer. With that the offended party cannot directly interfere. But

it has relations also to his feelings and conduct. There his duty begins. The offended party must beware of the temptation to do as much wrong as he receives.

1. *The spirit of forgiveness does not imply an entire absence of anger.* Some persons think all anger is sinful; and hence they are shocked to hear God speak of himself as being angry. The Bible never says: be drunk, and sin not; but it does say: "be ye angry, and sin not." Anger is a natural and innocent passion, easily carried to excess; but not necessarily. The occasion of its proper excitement is, when we see or hear of wrong actions or words. It is given to men for the checking of wrong-doing in others, and for a proper degree of self-defence. "If thy brother trespass, rebuke him." That is the proper exercise of anger; to have and to manifest an indignation at a wrong, not particularly as against us, but as a wrong in itself; a wrong against God; against the offender himself; and against us.

2. *The spirit of forgiveness is benevolence, which remains unmoved by any amount of personal suffering.* The pride of man makes his anger become revenge. He ceases to be affected by the moral wrong in an action, because he is doing an equal wrong in his selfish hatred of the wrong-doer. A mind rightly balanced cannot esteem a person so much, in whom it sees a wrong disposition, as it could if that wrong had not existed. But we must ever discriminate between complacency and benevolence. Your complacency may be disturbed, and even destroyed by the wrong act of another person; but your benevolence must not be changed by seventy times seven injuries.

The law of forgiveness may then be reduced to these rules:



Do not exaggerate the evil implied in the offence. The danger here, is, that our complacency may be entirely withdrawn, and we shall cease to see any thing but evil in the person offending. That is the form of prejudice which political parties, national antipathies, and sectarian feelings produce. A man may injure you wrongfully, and yet have more goodness left in him, than there is in you whom he offends. You should be willing to see it, and acknowledge it, and esteem him for it.

Be ready to restore all your complacency when he gives evidence of sincere repentance. "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; but if he repent, forgive him;" put him back again in the warm affections of thy heart; forgive him from the heart, and declare it to him cordially; treat him and his past offence, just as you wish God to treat you and your past offences. Forget it, only as it tends to make you regard him with more sympathy. A deaf mute on being asked, what is gratitude, wrote for answer, "the memory of the heart." I would borrow his idea; and say, forgiveness is the heart's oblivion of injuries. This sentiment is thus beautifully illustrated in the epitaph on Bishop Boulter:

"Some write their wrongs in marble; he, more just,  
Stooped down serene, and wrote them in the dust;  
Trod under foot, the sport of every wind,  
Swept from the earth, and blotted from his mind.  
There buried in the dust he bade them lie,  
And grieved they could not 'scape th' All-Seeing eye."

A third rule; it takes no delight in the sufferings of the offender, merely because he has despised, or

injured, or hated us. "Charity rejoiceth not in evil." Revenge does. If her enemy hunger, charity will give him bread. She has no desire to vindicate herself. If we have a sense of wrong as wrong, even though it be against ourselves, we may rightly desire to have law maintained, justice established, and pride abased. This is the spirit of those imprecatory Psalms which are such a stumbling-block to many persons. When we are commanded (Rom. xii.) not to avenge ourselves, why is it immediately added: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord?" Can it be for any other reason, than that the sentiment of justice is not wrong, but right, and may rightly look for the vindication of right? But we are not the avengers. We are pardoned sinners; having had ten thousand talents forgiven us, we may well forgive all personal injuries, and hope that the transgressor may repent as we have done, and find the same mercy. But if he do not, we must still wish him well, and leave him to a righteous God. Our duty is, if we are smitten on one cheek, to turn the other also. We are to give our coat when our cloak is taken from us. We are to go two miles with him that compels us to go one. In all this it is simply inculcated that we have no revenge, no hatred; that we render not evil for evil; that we bear and forbear; be injured, rather than contend; be willing to do good beyond all claims of right. When the Saviour commented on the Levitical law, and condemned the sentiment of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," he referred to personal revenge. Moses gave that law to the magistrate. Wicked men had brought it down to personal practice.

These rules exhibit the essential elements of the



spirit of forgiveness ; not to overlook the good in a person offending us ; to be ready to love him on his repenting, as before his offence ; to take no delight in his sufferings ; to have no desire of revenge. We now notice,

## II. HOW THIS IS IMPLIED IN THE CONDITIONS OF OUR FORGIVENESS.

Repentance and Faith are those conditions. But,

1. *Repentance is a restoration in the heart, of the natural sentiment of justice.* We have not repented, unless we have subjected our emotions to right reason, and an enlightened conscience. But right reason requires all that is required in the spirit of forgiveness ; that we acknowledge and esteem the good that is in him who injures us ; that we fully restore our esteem to him who repents of his error ; that we have no malicious delight in the sufferings even of an enemy ; that we leave the vindication of right and truth in the hands of the magistrate and of the Lord. Selfishness exaggerates our own sufferings, and attaches a peculiar guilt to evils committed against us. It leads to a malignant hatred of our enemies, to an excessive desire to bring down all who despise us. But this is not reasonable. And true repentance is the return to all that is reasonable and just. Therefore we are never forgiven if we have not the spirit of forgiveness. Moreover,

2. *Repentance is a return to the spirit of obedience.* But God commands us to forgive. “ If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. When ye stand praying, forgive if ye have aught against any. Love your enemies ; bless

them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." He that repents, therefore, repents of all his disobedience to these commands, and now desires and seeks for a complete conformity to them. And he that indulges an unforgiving temper, is therefore still impenitent, and so unforgiven himself. Moreover,

3. *Faith is itself the reception of full and gratuitous forgiveness.* The Gospel presents God as indulging no personal revenge ; as continuing his benevolent regard for men after all their transgressions ; as making a provision for their forgiveness ; as forgiving cordially the greatest sinner, on his repenting. When therefore a sinner comes to seek forgiveness from his Creator, he is required to exercise faith in God, which is not only confidence, but a cordial assent to his mode of forgiveness, a full and profound sympathy with that grace by which he is pardoned. Here then is a death-blow to the revengeful spirit, just so far as faith is exercised.

It destroys the pride which is the mainspring of revenge. It is only when one unduly estimates himself, that he unduly regards the injuries he receives. But how can one who has humbled his soul before God, and supplicated forgiveness for his innumerable offences, turn away from that mercy-seat, and display to his fellow-sinner an unforgiving disposition ? The thing is impossible, so far as he has faith, for faith begins in an utter prostration of pride.

It is also a fervent admiration of God's gracious disposition. He that loves God for his forgiving clemency, will desire to possess the same in himself.



Faith is likewise a cordial sympathy with God in his kindness. Therefore it is impossible that one in the exercise of that faith which earnestly and with delight contemplates God blotting out innumerable sins, and those his own, should meet a fellow-transgressor, whose sin against him must be immeasurably less than his against God, and take him by the throat, and cast him into prison, while he is supplicating for forbearance.

*An irascible, proud, revengeful, unforgiving temper is then as destructive as any other sin.* Why should any justify it? Some do. They think the bad treatment they receive is peculiarly offensive; that it is of great importance that they should tolerate no insult, and particularly from such persons. But how can they use that prayer; forgive me as I forgive others? If you deal with absolute justice towards men, then God will so deal with you. “With what measure ye mete, it shall be meted to you. He shall have judgment without mercy, that showed no mercy.” God gives no pardon where there is not such penitence as produces humility, and such faith as produces love.

If any has such a disposition, let him then abandon it by repenting of it; by asking forgiveness for it; by praying for the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit; by studying the meek and lowly example of him who prayed for his murderers; by comparing his sins towards God with other men’s injuries and offences towards him; by seeing how perfectly a vindictive spirit renders one unfit to die, and unfit for heaven.

How careful should parents and instructors be to inculcate this lesson on children! As they repeat

the Lord's prayer every night or morning, fix their attention on that remarkable limitation of the prayer for forgiveness—"as we forgive others," and show them its meaning.

*This subject shows us the wonderful goodness of God. He loves his enemies. He has no complacency in them, because they are wicked; but his benevolence is unchanged, unwearied by all their provocations.*

He always forgives when it is possible; and when he does not forgive, it is no unkind, selfish, or revengeful feeling which hinders him. The Lord Jesus Christ is forgiving his people, every day, their treatment of him. They are not wilfully violating his commandments, but they are defective, in their best estate.

When God takes vengeance, it is the avenging of insulted justice; the defence of violated law; the protection of order, the righteous expression of opposition to sin.

He aims to secure for an offender defence against injustice. That is the aim of this requirement. A man has injured you. If you avenge yourself, you will in turn do him an injustice. Against that the goodness of God defends you, and commands you to love him; thus securing for him as much kindness as possible.

He moreover aims to keep you from wrong feeling. Nothing can exalt you but goodness. Revenge degrades you. How noble did Themistocles appear as he stood before Eurybiades the Spartan general, pleading against an attack on the Persians! The Spartan general was enraged, and lifted his hand to strike the



ambassador. "Strike," said Themistocles, "but hear me!" When we have no private revenge, we are happy. And God commands us to be happy; never to be weary of forgiving, to forgive from the *heart*.

*Are your sins great; pray for forgiveness in a forgiving spirit.*

## LECTURE XIII.

### THE DISHONEST STEWARD; OR, THE RIGHT USE OF RICHES.

LUKE XVI. 1-9. "And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayst be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

THE preceding chapter was addressed to the Pharisees; this, to the rich disciples. It takes a group of worldlings, and shows them all to be wise in their way. The lord was a shrewd man, looking after his affairs, and keeping his agents under vigilant control; dismissing the unfaithful; commending the shrewdness of villainy, without very severe reprehension. The



steward looked out for himself, for he was wise in his generation. The debtors fell in with his cunning arrangements, which helped their purses.

In the tombs of Egypt are found paintings representing a steward taking account of the grain brought in by the various servants or tenants of his lord. Such a steward was Joseph in Potiphar's house; and such he had under his control, afterward, in Pharaoh's house. The conduct of one of these officers is selected by our Saviour to illustrate a point of great importance. A steward is accused to his lord of improvidence; and, perhaps, dishonestly. He is summoned to answer the charge, and told that he must leave the service. With this prospect before him, he began to reflect how he could best provide for himself. And after determining that there were but three courses—labor, begging, or fraud,—he chose the latter. He would not steal; but he would make friends of the tenants and debtors of his lord, by involving them with him in fraud, to their advantage. On this story Christ founded an exhortation in these words: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Unrighteous mammon means here uncertain, deceitful wealth; and the term may have a still profounder allusion to the fraud against God essentially involved in the "love of money," which is idolatry. By superficial attention some have feared that this parable partly holds up dishonesty as a model. Not to perplex you with men's various opinions of its design, I would simply state that the audience, the connection and the whole structure make it clear that its lesson is on the real and permanent good which may arise from a

right use of money. Christ had just defended himself against the Pharisees for associating with publicans. Now he turns to address the publicans, whose employment was full of temptations ; and shows them incidentally, that beginning to tamper with dishonesty naturally leads on to higher degrees of crime ; but mainly, to show them and all men that wealth could be used for immortal good. And he brings in a dishonest steward, perhaps because just such a case was generally known to have occurred ; it might have been in some high functionary. He no more designs, by introducing and comparing him to a true Christian, to approve of him, than he intends to approve of the unjust judge, when he compares God as the hearer of prayer, to him. The lord who commended the unjust steward was not Christ, but the steward's lord. And yet Christ does commend his looking to the future in his arrangements ; for he adds, when men get into dangerous positions in their worldly affairs, they set about extricating themselves ; but when these same men look to eternity and the results of being cast out of their stewardship there, they lose their forethought. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The lesson then the parable lays before us is, that

*Riches rightly used will confer on us immortal benefits.* From no parable has the Saviour made more inferences than from this. The first is : "make to yourselves friends, that they may receive you into everlasting habitations ;" which, by a usage of the Greek language, is equivalent to—"ye may be received into everlasting habitations." These everlasting habitations were suggested by the welcome the steward was to re-



ceive to the several mansions of those debtors. These were temporary ; but those are everlasting. Another inference is : “ he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much ; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.” This is a general principle here introduced to show that a selfish use of riches in this world proves one unfaithful to God, and unfit for the higher trusts of heaven ; seeming to intimate that there, so far from an inactive life, the faithful shall be stewards of “ much.” “ If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon,” if ye cannot use mere worldly good well, “ who shall commit to your trust the true riches ? ” “ And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own ? ” This remark strikes another deep vein of truth. Riches are not ours ; neither palaces, nor pictures, grounds, garments, fleets, armies, luxuries nor pomps ; these do not belong to us. Some of them belong directly to Satan ; and the children of light should have nothing to do with them. Some of them are good in themselves ; but their owner is in heaven. He has put them in our possession for a little while ; to try us and to discipline us. If we stand the trial well, then we shall receive our own ; the riches and honors and glory which are appropriate to our spiritual and immortal nature. One other inference is : “ No servant can serve two masters ; for, either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” It is from the delight in serving mammon, instead of making mammon serve its master and ours, that we are found unfaithful to God.

How then may riches benefit their owner eternally? Directly, and indirectly.

I. BY MAKING RICHES A SERVANT, AND NOT A MASTER.

The struggle of our arch-adversary to subdue us through “the deceitfulness of riches,” makes a strong feature of our probationary state. If we succumb there, we are conquered for eternity. If we conquer, eternal laurels await our brows.—This is then the state of the case.

1. *Mammon strives to keep the heart from God.* By mammon we understand him who is called elsewhere “the God of this world;” here denominated by a heathen name, equivalent to Pluto, whom the pagans made at once god of hell and god of money. Wealth has a real and great value, because it can meet so many absolute necessities of our condition, and also gratify some of the strongest passions. Society must own it; man must use it. How much? No rule is laid down. This question is, in fact, a constant test of the heart. And every one who acquires more than sufficient for his personal wants is thrown on his personal responsibility to know his heart, and to keep it righteous before the omniscient. When God is loved supremely, property takes its right place in the affections, the judgment is soundly exercised to determine just what its value is, how much it should be esteemed, and how much confidence should be reposed in it as the means of happiness. When the belief has entered the heart, that gold is able to confer happiness without the favor of God, then it has become master. It has gained that supreme confidence and esteem which belong to the Most High; and there, in place of his authority and



commands will be put those various statutes, ordinances and usages which King Mammon has ordained, from time immemorial, for all those who seek his favor and depend on his aid. If we conquer the foul spirit in this struggle for ascendancy, we shall reap eternal benefits from the victory.

2. *Property tends to become our master; and so, to hinder our serving God.* This it does by getting too strong a hold upon the mind. To serve God we must find time for calm, serious, and connected thought. One day in seven the cares, perplexities, projects and prospects of business must be dismissed, and be to us as though they were not. The glorious Being that made us, his care over us, the wonderful work of redemption, and our own interest in it, must all occupy the mind. The day, in fact, is lost to us for the service of our Maker, if we tread, in our thoughts, the old track of six days' business, and do not suffer God and eternal things to come in and dwell there. If that day is lost to that service, then the other six are sure to be. And thus the slave of mammon goes on, without even thinking of the claims of his Maker, and the claims of his own immortal being. Then, as a matter of course, all the other powers of the soul are withdrawn from God. Surely such a pursuit or such an employment of money can bring no blessings in the world to come.

3. *Property may be made subservient to the growth of piety, by disciplining the heart in the possession and use of it.* God is pleased to have us feel that no amount of wealth can make us independent of his sovereign will. And when we guard our hearts against the feeling of security from the possession of property, making God our trust, and his Word our assurance,

then the possession has been a trial resulting in our improvement. There is a prudence in reserving property for a future day of want. But that prudence easily degenerates into a feeling of idolatrous confidence, which betrays itself in many ways. When wealth increases, the idolatrous heart becomes more forgetful of God ; less fearful of his displeasure, more impatient of his restraints. If ever there was thankfulness for his kindness, that thankfulness is less and less felt or expressed as property accumulates. Therefore we may make all our personal expenditures means of our own spiritual improvement, by referring them all to God, in this way. If we acknowledge Him as their author, then we will make the whole system of expenditure conform to his will, so far as we can ascertain that will. The world and its customs will not be the standard. Our own inclinations will be modified and controlled by what appears to us conformed to the great purpose of our existence, and our greatest usefulness to our fellow beings. It is not best that every body should wear brown cloth and broad-brimmed hats, therefore we do not adopt the Quaker costume. It is not best for civilized beings to live in wigwams, therefore we have better houses than the savage. It is not best to pretend to be richer than we are, therefore we suffer our richer neighbors to build, furnish and live more elegantly than we. It is not best to make a vain display ; therefore we purchase not for display and to excite envy, but to surround ourselves and our friends with what gratifies our natural and healthful tastes. In the education of children the same modification of personal feeling and reference to the Divine will is seen. They are not to be prepared for mere display, or trained



to habits of indolence ; but every thing that will develop their better faculties, and form their characters, and prepare them for true happiness, honor and usefulness is expended, so far as the other claims or income admit. These are specimens of the reasonings by which Christian men of different grades of wealth endeavor to regulate their expenditures ; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do it to glorify God. Such expenditure does not hurt, but helps the soul.

In the same light we may regard the beneficent use of property. To appropriate money to the promotion of religion in other men, is a personal benefit to us. And it is so in many ways. To esteem an object out of itself more than self, helps the soul to mount upward. And that is enlightened self-love ; for it will surely react upon us most beneficially in this world, and for ever in the other. To give to truth because it is truth, is to increase our love of truth. To give to Christ that which might have gratified some selfish desire, is to increase our love of Christ. There is now a vast process of education going on in the Church. And the people who are taking the liveliest interest in spreading Christ's Gospel, are receiving the greatest degree of that benefit. The poorest member cannot afford to lose the privilege of contributing, for this reason, if for no other. The education of which I speak, is, an enlarged and enlarging interest in the welfare of all parts of the earth, and every branch of the human race ; a consequent enlarged knowledge of geography, political and physical ; a knowledge of great moral enterprises and changes. A new motive has entered to induce them to take an interest in the political changes which are going on ; so that the monthly concert of

prayer is becoming a great school to the Church. But added to this is a higher process of education. The enlargement and refining of the sympathies ; the religious affections enlisted in every gift we make to the various and increasing means of extending the kingdom of Christ, is a source of personal benefit, infinitely greater than any which a direct expenditure on self can produce.

But there is another aspect of the subject. Property may become a source of indirect eternal benefit to its owner.

II. MONEY CAN BE SO EXPENDED IN TIME, AS TO MEET US WITH THE MOST BLESSED RESULTS IN ETERNITY.

We may look first at

1. *The impressions of benevolent expenditure on the persons benefited.* These are very various in different cases. Often we confer temporal favors, and get no love nor thanks. At other times we meet that rich reward which Job experienced ; “when the ear heard me, then it blessed me. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me ; and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind ; and feet was I to the lame.” The difference in the results to ourselves, of benefiting men temporarily and spiritually, will be in the degree of their gratitude if they meet us in heaven. While Christ will be acknowledged as the only Redeemer, there will be ample scope for the overflowings of gratitude there for that feeble instrumentality which man may have employed for the salvation of his fellow-man. But surely, though we can do but little in one sense, that little may be made by God like the smallest link in the longest chain ; in itself of



little worth, in its place, as important as the chain itself. Wonderful arrangement; yet real! "They will receive you into everlasting habitations." One will greet you as you enter the world of the redeemed, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; long have I waited to tell thee what thou hast done for me. I was a heathen, perishing in the corruptions of my heart; and thou didst leave home and civilized life to find and rescue me. And, by the grace of God, I am here to praise redeeming mercy, for ever. Words will never utter the gratitude I feel to God, and to thee." Welcomes like this will indeed be "receiving into everlasting habitations." Other forms of beneficence will undoubtedly be recognized gratefully in that blessed world. But as men are sometimes disposed to think the only real charity is that which feeds and clothes and comforts the body; regarding all that is done to communicate the means of salvation to those who do not enjoy them, as fanaticism, let us put the two in contrast. Not that he so contrasts them who takes care of the immortal interests of others. To him the temporal wants of men have their true relative importance. Suppose, then, an inhabitant of heaven could say to one person, I remember with gratitude your kindness. Hungry and naked you found me, and fed and clothed me; and thus diminished the sorrows of my lot. But to another he says: I was pursuing the downward way to perdition; you sent to me the word of God; which, but for you, I should never have seen. I read it, and was led by it to the Saviour and to heaven. Indebted to both these persons, to which will his gratitude be the greatest?

If then this be our Saviour's meaning in the para-

ble, wherein are the children of this world wiser in their generation than the children of light? The fact he intended to present in that remark is, that in their generation—taking this world as they do, to be all there is—they have a more ready perception of future good; are more prompt in their decisions as to what is to be done; and they carry their resolutions more promptly and vigorously into action. This steward no sooner sees himself on the verge of absolute want than he sets himself to ward off the evil. He determines what is to be done, and does it. And acting on his principles, it was the best thing to be done. And that promptness of decision and action generally characterizes those who are taking care only of their temporal welfare. But when those same men become convinced of the realities of the future state, what becomes of this promptness, sagacity and energy? Not one in a thousand seems to exercise it. It is a fact, and a humiliating fact for poor human nature. But while we acknowledge and deplore it, there is something more to be done; even on the low grounds of a prudential regard to our own welfare; and the motive urged in this parable ranges no higher than that we ought to change our course. And, to-day an incitement should come to us from contemplating the eternal consequences of rightly employing our property, which should be felt by us even to the end of our earthly career. We are called here to derive, even from the wicked conduct of a man, an important lesson. It brings to our view a great principle of the divine government; that the future lies in the present. It is not taught that departed spirits can reward our beneficent actions towards them with salvation; nor that mere charity to



the needy will entitle to it. But three principles are here set forth. One is, that the want of charity will shut us out of heaven. This point the Saviour exhibits in the remarks: "he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" We were placed here, first to be tried by law, to see whether we would love and serve God as our natural Lord and Master. To test us, we are variously entrusted with time, light, mental faculties, and property. Now, our Master's will is made known to us, that we should make such use of our property as would please God; that is, advancing our own real improvement, the interests of his kingdom, and the temporal and eternal welfare of men. If we prove ourselves unfaithful to that trust,—not answering those intentions, nor meeting those desires of our Lord, then we shall meet the doom of the faithless. We have proved ourselves unfit to hold the smaller interests of our Master in our hands; how can he consistently with justice, wisdom, or benevolence, put into our hands those vaster trusts which will belong to every inhabitant of heaven! We who have not prudence enough to take care of our own eternal welfare, how shall we be advanced to positions where the happiness of thousands probably must be, in a measure, committed to us! But none of us can be saved by the law; then shall we be saved by Christ? That again he refers to the same test; and you remember with what solemnity, in his description of the final judgment—"I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat." We may indeed give our money to useful institutions and needy persons, without being cleansed by the blood of Christ,

or renewed by his Spirit. But if we are cleansed and renewed, then it will be seen in this, as one of the results of regeneration. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Christ gave himself to religion and the poor. He consented to poverty, because he could thus best subserve our interests. That is his spirit. And have we it? One answer is to be found in our estimate of property; another, in our use of it. It will show whether we admire Christ's benevolence in renouncing for the good of mankind all the advantages and enjoyments of property! It will show whether his love constrains us to sustain his struggling cause in the world. It will show whether we feel toward the poor as he did; and whether we have the same mind that was in him in regard to saving the souls of men. It will show whether he or mammon is our Master; for we cannot serve both; and one we must serve. Therefore, in the light of a test of the character, and a prophetic announcement of the destiny of each one of us, this parable contains a momentous truth for us.

It moreover opens a vision of glorious destiny to them who are laying up their treasures in heaven. To the man whose sins are forgiven, and whose person is accepted in Christ; who is using his property, be it great or small, for the purposes for which God has loaned it to man, a future is opening up, brighter than any imagination on earth can conceive. We can now crudely contemplate the elements that compose it; nothing more. It is couched by our Saviour in these words: "That when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." There will be four classes there to welcome him. Christ will receive him into



everlasting habitations. This he has stated in very strong and explicit terms, and frequently. “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom—inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.” “Well done, good and faithful servant,” &c. Paul expected a crown of life which the righteous Judge should give him. “I go to prepare a place for you.—I will receive you unto myself.—In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” These mansions are everlasting habitations. Has your faith an eye that can gaze now on the scene of a soul that has first committed itself to Christ, and then faithfully followed him; called to meet him at last in person? Ushered into his presence, it sees what it has been the most cherished desire of its heart to see,—the God-man in the glory of his kingdom, on the throne of heaven. And he from that throne comes down to recognize and welcome his faithful disciple. It was the gathering brightness of this scene, as it became more and more distinct, that drew from the grave and unimpassioned Evarts, the rapturous exclamation—“Glory, glory, unspeakable glory!” Another reception then awaits the redeemed spirit from the holy angels. They rejoiced at the mighty change that brought it into the kingdom of Christ on earth. Now they exult in its reception home. Bright, blessed, noble spirits; how grand in stature and in bearing; yet how gentle and how kind! Whom their Lord loves, they love. His welcome insures theirs. Welcome, welcome, they say, faithful steward, to these everlasting habitations! Then the redeemed are there; and they join in the greetings of that glad occasion. They know the joy of that home; and they seem to

magnify their own share of it by the accession of every new participant in its blessedness. There are the names we have ever held in the profoundest reverence which can properly be rendered to men. And there are some that we held dearest and most cherished on earth. They will welcome you from a life of fidelity on earth to a life of glory in heaven. But principally the text seems to bring to our view those whom we may have benefited in the use of our property. Theirs will be a peculiar welcome. The debtors of this lord, partly from gratitude, and partly to save themselves from exposure, but certainly with an utter loss of respect for his character, would be compelled to do something for the support of this steward. But here will be unmingled gratitude, love and respect, as they welcome their benefactor to share that blessedness they enjoy. Thus our beneficent employment of earthly good may redound to our everlasting joy. And so the highest form of prudence is, by this parable, enlisted against the meanness of covetousness and a selfish expenditure of property.

But let no benevolent man imagine he can make a Saviour of his charities.





## PART II.

### THE TREATMENT THE GOSPEL RECEIVES.

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#### § 1. ITS REJECTION.

- Lect.* XIV. The Seed on the wayside.  
“ XV. The Seed on stony places.  
“ XVI. The Seed among thorns.  
“ XVII. The Two Sons.  
“ XVIII. The Great Supper.

#### § 2. ITS ACCEPTANCE.

- Lect.* XIX. The Seed in good ground.  
“ XX. The Lost Son restored.





## LECTURE XIV.

### SEED ON THE WAYSIDE; OR, THE HEEDLESS HEARER.

MATT. XIII. 4 and 19. "And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside."

SEED, to be productive, must find a suitable soil. Yet it often occurs to the sower that some seed falls not on the ploughed ground, nor into the mellow furrow, but on the path that crosses the field. There it is either crushed by the foot of man, or seized by the fowls of the air. This path of the field represents the heart of the man who hears the Gospel without attention ; *hearing*, but not *understanding*, nor retaining it ; and therefore producing no fruit of righteousness.

This part of the parable is founded on the principle, that *attention is the first claim of the Gospel*. The Gospel claims attention from us,

#### I. AS TRUTH.

By a mental law, truth and the mind can have no connection but through the medium of attention. Even



that most spiritual and inward knowledge which we receive through our consciousness, we obtain only by attending to it. Much more obviously is this true of all we learn by language.

A most affecting narrative may be related to you, which, if you heard it, would move you to tears ; and yet, the mind being intent on some other subject, not a fact of the whole story makes any impression on the feelings ; or you may read an entire page of a book, word by word, and not be able to tell one idea it contains.

Let us proceed then to notice more precisely the laws under which the Creator has placed this faculty of the mind.

1. *The attention is voluntary.* If we give ourselves up to waking dreams, the mind will be found floating like a billet of wood on a river full of eddies, and back-flowing currents ; now running swiftly in one direction, and suddenly rushing in another. To fix the thought steadily in any one direction, to meditate or study ; even to see or to hear, a purpose or intention is necessary. But still farther :

2. *Attention is under the law of habit.* When a child commences to learn the letters of the alphabet, he finds it very difficult to discriminate them, and to remember the differences in their forms, names and powers. But by practice his attention becomes so easily fixed, that he will at length read for many hours, without having the slightest difficulty in discriminating these letters. There is consequently still another law :

3. *An obligation rests on man to exercise and improve this power.* For, we know that some of the high-

est obligations of life involve a right exercise of attention. All intellectual improvement involves it. All moral improvement depends upon it; self-knowledge being essential to the process of self-improvement; and self-knowledge requiring much concentrated attention on our own actions and motives.

The duties and proprieties of life require a most rigorous exercise of attention. A careless or heedless man is not fit to be a member of a civilized community. Every hour, in fact every moment of business or of social intercourse, is calling this power into exercise.

The discharge of every sacred trust calls for a stern exercise of attention, as in the case of the surgeon, the physician, the teacher, or the pilot.

The lowest ground then we can take is, that the Gospel at least stands on a level with other truth, and claims man's attention as truth; and that the exercise of attention is not a thing optional with us, but is in the rank of our highest obligations; for the Word of God cannot be understood by the inattentive. "He heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not." The Gospel, however, has a claim still in advance of that:

II. AS A SYSTEM OF TRUTH HAVING PECULIAR DIFFICULTIES TO THE HUMAN MIND. For, it includes

1. *Spiritual facts as its basis and its end.* The law to which I here refer, and which all will recognize and admit, without questioning, is this: that the difficulties presented by any duty are only a stimulus to our energies.

The difficulties of life have been the occasion of making all the greatness the world has ever witnessed



in men. The law of human life is, that man shall earn his bread by the sweat of his brow ; first, the ploughing and sowing, then the harvest.

Now there are intrinsic difficulties in the truths of the Gospel. They do not require extraordinary degrees of intellectual power, which are rarely bestowed ; but a spiritual apprehension, which it is equally the privilege of all to possess. God is their chief theme ; most intimately present, and yet imperceptible to any of the senses. Our soul's relations to him are fundamental truths of the Gospel ; but these relations are spiritual. Sin is the spiritual quality of man's evil actions in God's view ; and guilt includes man's unseen, but awful relations to God's retributive justice. Christ is now unseen. The Holy Spirit is unseen and unheard by bodily organs. The judgment-day is in the future ; so are heaven's glories, and hell's destruction.

But all these spiritual topics meet the mind, with its earthly tendencies fully developed by nature and by habit. The spiritual nature is paralyzed. " Having eyes, they see not ; having ears, they hear not." The natural current of the thoughts is not spiritual. It is difficult for our earthly sluggish minds to seize the pure sublime truths of the Gospel, so as to receive from them any appropriate and permanent impression. That however only makes the necessity more urgent for a voluntary control of the attention. The Gospel likewise contains,

2. *Painful truths* ; being a direct, unqualified attack upon cherished desires and confirmed habits. The first interview of the Bible with him who takes it up in earnest, is an arrest ; a trial ; a condemnation ; a delivering over to judgment ; annihilating self-compla-

cency ; leaving the man defenceless at the bar of divine justice ; making his life and his heart appear hideous ; setting before him duties to which he is most adverse. Here lies a difficulty in securing attention to it. You may gain a ready attention to the literature of the Bible ; to its sublime descriptions of the Deity : to the sweet invitations of mercy it contains. But all these too frequently are used by man, only to conceal from himself that which he hates in the Gospel.

While then the painfulness of these truths is a reason that explains his turning away from just the part he most needs to hear, it is also the reason why he should fix his attention most earnestly there. The renunciation of his own righteousness ; the acquiescence in his condemnation ; the voluntary assumption of Christ's yoke and cross ; are the very results in him at which the Gospel aims, and the very things from which he shrinks. We may say again :

3. *The doctrines of the Gospel are contested truths.* And the contest, our Lord informs us, is first begun by another party before man takes it up. The fowls, he states, are as really significant as the seed, though subordinate as a part of the parable ; and are introduced to point out the wicked one, the blighted angel, whose eminence remains the eminence of evil and of shame. This being is called "a liar," as he is the arch-enemy of truth ; "the father of lies," as he originated the process of deception, and organized that intellectual antagonism which questions, dilutes, or rejects the doctrines of redemption ; fortifying it with vast doctrines of philosophy, which appear to men wiser and profounder than the doctrines of the Cross. This is the spirit of the curious, subtle Grecian intellect, to which the



preaching of the Cross is foolishness. Some find insuperable difficulties in particular doctrines. Others are prejudiced against the principles for being so much better than those who profess to believe them. And he has taught another class in his school to look within themselves for illumination. The Scriptures tell them things of which they have no consciousness, and which seem to them very improbable; and which they reject, as they regard the sun within to be a brighter light than the sun in the heavens. The great fact that they are sinful and ill-deserving, to such a fearful extent, they cannot see to be true; such an urgency in their case they cannot realize, when they are conscious only of calmness and hope. And then there is a mighty wielding by this dread agent of all the wounded sensibilities of the soul, to prejudice it against the Gospel. And to his aid comes the power of habit; the habit of listlessness in one; of sensuousness in another; or of walking, as the Scriptures say, in unbelief; setting the things that are seen and temporal, against the things that are unseen and eternal. There is a habit of gossiping or chatting which effectually destroys serious impressions and wholesome thoughts; a rushing from sacred themes to worldly thoughts and interests, that, like the fowls, catches up what few seeds lie on the portals of the ear, half-heard, half-conceived, half-remembered.

These difficulties then are the arguments which we press for securing a more earnest and purposed attention to the Gospel. But this is not all; the Gospel claims a supremely earnest attention—

## III. AS TRUTH OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE.

1. *It is God's special revelation in human language.* He has spoken in every work of his hand, and every event of his providence; yet they could not communicate all he would say to man in his apostate and helpless condition. There were feelings that he must utter in man's words; there were acts he must transmit in a record bearing infallible marks of his authentication. There are invisible realities; there are coming events; there are principles of moral government; and above all, there is a redemption which could be clearly, fully, and credibly communicated to man, only by a spoken or written word. The Jewish Scriptures claim to be a portion of that word; and Jesus Christ gave his full sanction to this claim. The writings of the apostles come to us sanctioned by these clear credentials:

Christ chose them to complete his message to mankind;

They claimed to be his messengers;

They had supernatural powers conferred upon them, as a daily seal of heaven to their veracity and competency;

Their word is but an expansion of the word of Christ;

Their system of doctrine accords with all the rest of the Scriptures;

Individuals in every age have testified to the divine light, power and life in them, as they have transformed their characters, purified their lives, and given them triumph in death;

Churches who have lived by that word have flour-



ished. Others have decayed and sunk into spiritual death, just as they have departed from it ;

The history of nations is a constant comment on the truth and power of the Scriptures. Equity, industry, freedom, benevolence, order, purity, truth and peace, follow in the track of the Scriptures ; and come and go, as they more or less control a community.

These are some of the marks the Scriptures present, of their being the very Word of God. But if the Almighty has thus addressed man in human language, in a very special manner, surely man is under immeasurable obligations to give attention to that word. It is God's word, addressed to all men, and to every man. Then, by every thing sacred and decent, by every consideration of propriety and of duty, every human being should listen to the Word of God. This is a point that can scarcely admit of an argument. If any one does not see it to be true on the very face of it, I know not how arguments will help the matter. If a child does not see the propriety and duty of giving a respectful attention when his venerable father addresses him, no process of reasoning could be of any value in the case.

And again we are bound to give such attention, because the Scriptures

2. *Fully and strongly exhibit our duties ;* the chief of which are those we owe to God. They make it clear as the noonday, what God requires of us. If we intend to obey him or to please him ; or if we hope to receive his blessing, there we learn the way. Unless a man is sure that he knows that duty fully by some other means, he can be under no stronger obligation than that of giving earnest attention to the Scriptures ; for,

as all other duty is shut up in that we owe to our Maker, so all other moral law is contained in that of the Scriptures. Duty, sacred duty is explained and enforced here.

They also fully exhibit our duty to man. The divine, unlike human law, goes into the heart, and regulates our feelings towards men; and then directs our speech and actions towards them. Unlike human laws, it requires not only a right negative, but also a right positive conduct toward man. Unlike human laws, it not only shows us that we must not injure man in his temporal interests, but it shows us how we may and should contribute to the immortal happiness of others.

Unlike all other codes of morals, it shows the possibility and the way of deliverance for a sinner. Thus it is the only directory to a righteousness that is at once feasible and sufficient. There probably never was such a problem for the universe to solve; and perhaps will never be again, as this: *How may an apostate soul achieve a righteousness which shall not be too high for him to reach, nor too low for God to accept?* It is the grand question for every created intelligence; for it has exhibited in its solution more than any other the riches of divine wisdom. If then every man is bound to have such a righteousness, he is bound to seek for it most earnestly, there where alone it is to be found. And yet again:

3. *God here treats of life and death eternal.* This is the sum. Through the whole Scriptures God is supreme. Then comes the soul of man, represented as occupying a day of time's great domain, and then entering on Eternity, on Destiny of an infinite duration.



Before this, the success of trade, the acquisition of brilliant accomplishments, the longest life of pleasure, the achievement of the most magnificent military or literary enterprise, the grandeur, pomp, honor, wealth, pleasure of earth in the highest degree ever enjoyed, or even to be enjoyed by men; yea, by all men together, sinks into an immeasurable, an invisible insignificance. If man's power of attention was bestowed on him for any benevolent purpose, surely this is the first; if it answers any valuable ends, surely this is among the chief. If man may properly be a wayside hearer in the schools of commerce, or science, or art, or philosophy, surely he may not be in the school of Christ. If man may sometimes be listless when man addresses him, surely he cannot be when God addresses him in regard to the endless life and the second death.

*Inattention to the Gospel must then be regarded as a great calamity.* "A calamity," I seem to hear it replied—"a great calamity!" Why, I can name five hundred men in this community; substantial citizens, in good business, living well, intrusted with the public interests, enjoying good health, happy in their families, happy in themselves; and yet they care no more for the Gospel than they do for the statute book. Both are good in their place, but not matters in which they have any direct personal interest. Now what is meant by calling their mode of hearing sermons, and treating the Bible, a calamity? For it is very certain that this description of the inattentive embraces just such persons. Yes, it does. And I mean to say that it is a dreadful calamity for them to be just such as they are, with all their worldly ease and prosperity, and good

citizenship. They are the wayside in Christ's great field. Not a seed that bears an immortal life ever drops into their hearts. And this very worldly prosperity, which so charms and satisfies you, which is the very goal of your ambition ; this is the foot that treads upon their hearts, day after day, making them harder and harder. It is the calamity of a great evil, being a cumulative growing evil. Job says : they "are mighty in power. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear. They send forth their little ones as a flock, and their children dance. They spend their days in wealth ; and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God : depart from us ; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him ? and what profit should we have, if we pray to him ?" Asaph says : "their strength is firm ; they are not in trouble as other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, thou shalt despise their image."

It is a calamitous thing to be in such a state, that Christ could find no better emblem for them than the beaten path in the plough field.

The habitual state of such a person is deplorable, whether you look at the condition of the heart, or the influence to which it is subject. It betrays a profoundness of ignorance which leaves the soul in practical heathenism. There is no clear recognition of any spiritual existence ; God, the soul, nor our relations to God. Such persons are no farther advanced toward God than pagans are. There is a deplorable insensibility to the evil of sin, to the guilt it contracts, to the



grace of Christ. And if the person has arrived at the maturity of his faculties, it has been, by a process which has laid waste the soil of the soul ; taking out as by a fire or the overflowing of the sea, all its finest fructifying powers, leaving it a marshy waste. It betrays a life wasted in vanity ; either dissipation and disorder, or the gravity and decency of a regular business-life spent without God, and in utter disregard of every obligation to him. It is life spent under the control of him whose policy Christ has here described ; who takes away the truth out of their hearts, “lest they should believe, and be saved.”

If you would appreciate the calamity which has befallen this man, see him approach the Bible. Every avenue by which its inestimable truths might enter, to save him, is closed. There is in him pride of wisdom ; for he already knows all that it can teach him. There is in him pride of character ; for he is not going to be classed with the chief of sinners. If any thing is there said about the good, he will look at that as a mirror to help him take a pleasant survey of his own beautiful figure. There is in him the love of present comfort. He is not going to have his quiet disturbed by vain fancies about depravity and eternal death. He is not going to be driven to cling to Christ, as a drowning man clings to a rope. Now how piteous is that man's state ! He has a Bible ; but it is spiritually a sealed book. It is all written in strange characters. It is the voice of God, but he cannot hear it ; it is the guide to heaven, but he cannot see it.

See him in praise ! God is not his object. See him in prayer ! It is not addressed to God. See him amid God's works. He cannot commune with their Maker,

and his ; for there is an unsettled controversy between them. Whoever does not love God in his word, has no real love for him in nature. See him coming to the house of God. The sower has the seed of heaven in his hands. But alas ! that man's heart is the wayside. Worldly thoughts have been treading out every religious feeling, from the hour of his awaking until he entered the sanctuary. The law shines forth in its purity ; but it produces no conviction in him. God threatens ; but he has no fear. Perdition glares upon him ; but it causes him no anxiety. Christ hangs bleeding on the cross before him ; but this awakes no penitence. Christ is seen on his throne ; but this creates in him neither love nor confidence. That heart has been, during its entire life, a trodden path, over which is written : *Free passage this way for every thing but Christ.* Yes, it is a calamity the more dreadful, because it is the man's chosen state.



## LECTURE XV.

### SEED ON STONY PLACES ; OR, THE COWARDLY HEARER.

MATT. XIII. 5, 6 ; 20, 21. "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth : and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth ; and when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away." "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it ; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

WE have contemplated the case of him who hears the word, from either custom, a vague sentiment of duty, or some other motive equally tending to make it ineffectual. The case to which we now come is different in the process, though arriving at the same fatal issue.

The seed that is to form a strong healthful stalk, requires in the soil not only the proper fertilizing qualities, but also sufficient depth to give it firmness, by both the tenacity of the root, and the quantity of nourishment it may supply. But many a piece of ground that has all the other requisites for fertility, is rendered useless to the tiller by its want of depth. The deep, broad, solid rock underlying, unmoistened

by the dews of heaven, unpenetrated by the genial rains, unbroken by the plough, meets the tender root shooting downward through a wondrous instinct. And in fact this very proximity of the rock to the surface may tend to facilitate the first sprouting of the seed, by increasing the warmth of the soil. But when the sun begins to return northward from his southern declination, and again approaches the equator, his torrid beams become too strong for the partially nourished plant, and it withers away.

This plant is the emblem Christ has chosen to point out a character but too common in the world; a case to which all men have a tendency, and against which the most definite warnings should be pronounced. It has two aspects; both of which need explanation. The one of its early promise; and the other, its early failure. It springs up "forthwith, because it had no deepness of earth;" and as soon as the sun is up, it is scorched, and withers away. Or, to drop the figure—a man hears the word, receives it anon with joy. But he endureth only for a while. For, presently some difficulty arises in carrying out his new principles, and he stumbles and falls. Here is a case of great promise in the commencement. The man is full of joy; he thinks he has found an inestimable treasure, has entered on a new life, tasted new joys, indulged new hopes; and others share his delightful anticipations. He "springs up;" he has manifestly become a religious man. But there is, alas! more stem than root, more show than substance. Had this seed struck its roots deep into the soil, it might have continued to drink the generous moisture, and thus to slake the thirst of its parched top. But there is no depth, and no moisture: so it



must sicken and die. The rich coloring gives place to the pale yellow ; it wilts, withers, dies and rots, while the rest of the field is green and growing. Often do men begin to manifest a supreme interest in religious truth, and in the service of God ; and yet ultimately are found to swerve from that service, and go back to various degrees of worldliness. This parable indeed describes two such cases, one of which is now before us ; and we are induced to inquire how it shall be accounted for. The solution is found in the want of moral courage. Our Lord says that when tribulation or persecution arises, because of the word, straightway he is offended, or stumbles. This then accounts for both stages of the case ; the prompt commencement of an apparently religious life, and the equally prompt termination of it.

We should here take a distinct view of the nature of courage. The common notion of it is, indifference to danger. But that does not distinguish this noble principle from rashness. It properly refers to that quality of mind by which the higher sentiments overrule the dread of suffering. These sentiments are such as patriotism, philanthropy, integrity, sense of duty, and sense of right. The opposite state of mind is that which places the escaping from suffering above every other consideration. And it is a person governed by that principle that is pointed out by this part of the parable. The want of moral courage, or courage in its higher form, makes a man partially enter the service of Christ, and ultimately desert it. He comes easily into it, and goes out as readily ; because he is seeking, not holiness, but comfort and safety. His piety must therefore be both superficial and transient. This habit

of placing comfort before goodness equally facilitates the beginning and the ending of his religious life ; for,

I. IT PREVENTS HIM FROM EVEN UNDERSTANDING THE THEORY OF THE GOSPEL, AND MUCH MORE FROM TRULY ACCEPTING ITS PROVISIONS.

Imagine a person awakened by the law of God to an apprehension of danger ; of guilt in his sight, and consequent exposure to the divine wrath. If he would regard the testimony of God, he would find more in his case than the exposure to suffering. But such is the operation of selfishness in the human heart, that often where this sense of danger is irresistibly urged home, there is still such a magnifying of suffering as the great evil, that the attention shall be fully absorbed by that. The first consequence is—

1. *He neither sees that Christ comes to save him from sin ; nor, that he is a sinner.* There is a natural evil which is the consequence of sin. But sin is itself the great evil. This person, however, shrinks from the pain of knowing his own vile heart. He is aware of some kind of danger ; but it is a danger not clearly defined. Some dreadful suffering awaits him after death ; and so vivid is his sense of it, that he must escape it at any cost. Under this vague apprehension of evil he turns to the Gospel. He has not learned, though it has been often placed before his mind, that there is an infinitely greater evil than suffering. He knows nothing of this evil, and, of course, is not seeking deliverance from it ; and therefore he does not perceive what the salvation of the Gospel is. Such is his aversion to suffering that he will not believe that the Gospel, which is glad tidings, the offer of salvation, the



word of mercy, is itself the cause of this pain he feels ; much less that it seeks to sink its arrow still deeper into his wounded spirit. Here he makes the first misstep. He dares not let the Bible speak to him, unmuffled. Here he begins to trifle with truth, to compromise with conscience. John, in vision, found the book of God's providence sweet to the taste when he first opened it, because it gratified his curiosity to know the future. But it was bitterness within him, after he had eaten it ; for it opened such painful scenes to his view. The reverse is the case with the book of grace. Its bitterness is in eating ; its sweetness in digesting. The Bible has but one testimony concerning the human heart. Men may dilute or deny it ; but there remains the testimony of him who searches the heart ; "it is desperately wicked." When the Comforter comes to represent the departed Saviour, he takes up his work, and convinces men of sin. When Christ invited men, he invited them under some view of their painful necessities ; hungry, thirsty, weary, weeping, imprisoned, blind, poor, naked, leprous, poisoned, dead. When the Gospel was first preached after the ascension, men were pricked in their hearts as though an arrow of God had pierced them. Christ told men to agonize to enter in at the narrow gate. This view of the condition of the heart is exceedingly painful. And he that has settled it as a controlling principle, that he must not be made to suffer even in saving his soul, will shrink from this light, and turn his attention to the fact that Christ is a merciful Saviour ; the Gospel is glad tidings ; Christ invites every one to come to him ; and to those who come, he has given exceeding great and precious promises. But he will not perceive that there

are two ways of coming to Christ. "Ye seek me," said he to some, "because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Some, too, followed him as a political leader. But those persons did not long find him to their taste. They found some of his sayings hard, and therefore turned back. It is this cowardly fear of knowing ourselves that makes many come to Christ with half their heart. And all the joy they get being founded in misapprehension of themselves and of him, must wither, for it has no deepness of earth, no strength of root.

2. *He misapprehends the atonement, or the ground of Christ's death.* This must make a superficial Christian. I will not affirm that there have not been solid Christians who did not take our view of the governmental nature of Christ's sacrifice. But I will affirm that it is necessary to believe in the substitutional or vicarious character of Christ's death. That is the full, glorious teaching of the Old and the New Testaments. That is the faith with which Abel began, which David and Isaiah proclaimed; which John the forerunner, Christ and the Apostles made prominent in their preaching. And it is by the power of sympathy with him as suffering in our stead, that we get the inspiration of that true courage which reconciles us to rejoice when we are counted worthy to suffer for his name's sake. But the admission of this fact that Christ died in our stead, opens the floodgates of anguish in the spirit that first really perceives it. There is the coming down of pride; there is the opening up to view of the depth of our ruin, the immensity, the immeasurableness of our guilt. But the soul that has been gained for comfort, and that regards suffering as the great evil, will never open its



eyes on the grandeur, the awfulness, the blessedness of that cardinal fact, nor come under its transforming power.

3. *He fails also to see the work of the Holy Spirit, and his own absolute dependence on that Spirit for renewal and sanctification.* “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” But that opens another painful view of his case. Here is the need of so radical a change that only the Omnipotent can accomplish it; and He too is sovereign in his operations. It is not in human nature to believe that without the deepest distress, until the heart has come to trust in God. Now I know there are persons who become, as they suppose, religious without being disturbed by these facts, or even believing them. Yet these remain facts; facts which Christ and his apostles made prominent in their preaching. And that they are not believed, only proves that they are disturbing and distressing to the unhumbled heart of man. No man would have quarrelled with these doctrines, or have taken the pains to prove in the face of the plainest language, that they are not taught in the Scriptures, if it had not been for their tremendous power in breaking up that false peace which those are determined to maintain, who love comfort more than the favor of God.

With this description it is easy to conceive how a person whose great want is, not deliverance from his own evil heart, but from fear and an undefinable future evil, may find in the Gospel only love, expressing itself in all the beauty of an exquisite style; a Saviour full of compassion, inviting all to come to him; promising to save them. He regards the salvation of the Gospel

as a salvation from suffering; and hence he receives the word "with joy." Sometimes this joy is tranquil; it has been known to amount to rapture.

Having thus overlooked the very nature and essence of the Gospel, his repentance is superficial; because repentance is not mourning for suffering, present or future, endured or merited; it is heart-sorrow for sin; sin as committed; sin as filling the life; sin as committed against an infinitely holy Being; sin as the enemy of God, of righteousness, of truth, of love, of loveliness, of happiness; sin as defiling, degrading, corrupting and ruining the soul. And he therefore who has looked at his danger alone, who has learned to dread only that; or, he who has determined to find in the Gospel only a better description of virtue, and in Christ only a purer example of it, cannot go very deep in the work of humiliation, godly sorrow, dying with Christ, and being buried with him. There lies in that heart the deep, dead, broad rock of impenitence and pride. Into its compact substance no root of conviction, of repentance, of faith, of love, ever penetrated. That man is still seeking happiness, not holiness. He has no opposition to his own heart. All is right there, he thinks. He has no opposition to the spirit of the world; for it is precisely his own. Its maxims might be reduced to two: avoid suffering, and especially in regard to your eternal welfare; get comfort as you go along. And that is just what he is doing. He cannot know nor appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can he serve him; for he is in the friendship of the world, against which Christ cautions us: "What man intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost?" And this he said after insist-



ing on the self-denying character of his service. But this person has no costs to count. It is not going to be a costly service. The very thing he has bargained for, is, an easy service. Christ gives peace ; and it is peace he wants, and not trouble. He can accordingly sail in smooth seas, and live well in fair weather with his religion. But,

II. HE CAN DO NO BETTER WITH THE PRACTICE OF THE GOSPEL THAN WITH ITS THEORY ; for,

1. *It requires him to struggle with sin in his own heart.* The work to which Christ calls us is a progressive conquest over spiritual evils in ourselves. Native dispositions, strengthened by habit, have an ascendancy over the will, which must be entirely destroyed. This is, at times, a very painful ; sometimes almost a discouraging work. God allows a regenerated soul to know more, a hundredfold, of the evil nature of sin, than he knew before his conversion. Perhaps some are spared this view. But I apprehend that every one who reaches heaven's golden gates, reaches them a conqueror ; and his greatest conquest is over himself. The body is to be conquered ; and the evils that reside in the spirit are to be conquered. This is what Christ intended to inculcate by his strong language about self-denial, and the daily bearing of the cross. "I keep my body under," said Paul, "lest, after preaching to others, I myself should be a cast-away." Some of the evil dispositions are exceedingly subtle, long avoiding the most vigilant observation. Yes, I venture to affirm, that the more intimately we enter into God's holy communion, the more do the asperities and obli-

quities of our dispositions manifest themselves to the awakened conscience.

Now it is in part this feature of Gospel service that weans the superficial religionist from Christ, and prepares him for an open rupture under any outward pressure. The early joy has passed away. Such a hope of pardon as at first cheered him, cannot long amuse. His religion does not consist in really preparing for heaven. It has nothing to do with his heart, the cross, the mercy-seat, the promises of God, eternity, or the great work that Christ has given his disciples to do in the world. It has no vitality, no power, no Saviour. It is a very dull affair; and he is quite tired of it. It was not religion from the beginning; it was too superficial, too earthly, too selfish, too cowardly, even to have been called that. It was a soldier bargaining with his captain, that the bullets should not be permitted to come very near him; for, as he had enlisted for a comfortable warfare, he could not go very far amid such dangerous things. Now follow him to the next stage:

2. *His conflict with the world.* Men of superficial religion are generally very much perplexed to know what the Scriptures mean by "the world," against which they speak so severely. "If," they say, "you are to understand by it—vicious persons, in distinction from upright people; very vulgar, from the refined; very irreligious, from the sober kind—then it has a substantial foundation in reality. But if it means to distinguish the people who do not profess to have had a change of heart, radical and permanent, from those that make such a profession, then it is an unmeaning distinction; and the epithet is badly chosen. Men



inside the Church are just as worldly as those outside. "Why," says this person, "I can find in the circle of my acquaintance a hundred sensible, well-bred persons, of the most sterling integrity, amiable, benevolent, reasonable, not irreligious ; will you call them the world, and denounce God's vengeance on them ? I cannot conceive what conflict I am to have with them. Such language always appear to me sheer extravagance."

The answer to all this is : your difficulty lies here ; you are in the world, and of it. You are in the cabin of a ship, sailing down the stream ; and when you are told that you are moving along, and leaving every thing stationary, you reply, "No, I find every thing stationary here ; I am conscious of no movement." Every thing around you moves so precisely with you, that motion is unperceived. "The world will love its own," the Saviour says.

If then you have lived thus far, and not found that Christ and Satan have two rival kingdoms in the world ; and that Satan is far from being contented to have only the vulgar and irreligious, I would ask you to turn your attention to a few statements.

God declares there is such an interest as the world in direct and deadly antagonism to his holy kingdom. Christ came into the world ; the world was made by him ; and yet it did not know him. "The *world* hateth me." The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit. "Ye are not of the *world* ; if ye were, the *world* would love its own. The *world* shall rejoice, but ye shall have tribulation. The *world* is crucified to me ; and I am crucified to it. The friendship of the *world* is enmity with God. Love not the *world*." Surely, then, there is such an interest in direct hostility to the kingdom of

our blessed Lord. It crucified Christ, persecuted and destroyed the disciples. This is the world, from which God requires his children to come out and separate themselves.

But, moreover, this world is separated from Christ's kingdom by a very different line than that already described. It is not vulgarity that makes the world. Some of the most refined in Jerusalem were Christ's murderous enemies. It is not poverty nor obscurity ; for the leaders in society secured his death. It is not immorality, for Dives is not accused of that ; and the rich young ruler who preferred the world to Christ, was very upright. No ; the line is drawn here. Those that see no great evil in their disobedience to God, and in their own hearts ; and who consequently place Christ, his Gospel, his redemption and his assistance on a level with other good institutions and influences, but no higher ; they are of the world. And if the analysis be pursued one step farther, it comes to this : they who dread suffering more than an evil heart, are of the world. They have long ago determined that religion shall not disturb them ; it may comfort them if it can ; but, disturb them, it shall not. That is worldliness. It betrays the radical spirit of unbelief in the testimony of God, and in the Cross of Christ. Such persons hate the self-denial of a spiritual life ; they find not their consolation and hope in Christ. They know nothing of fervent love and gratitude to him. They are not very apt to be conversant with the Scriptures.

Now this is the world that sifts the Church, and tries the genuineness of its members ; and often, rather ungenerously despises them, after enticing them from their apparent devotion to Christ. "What?" you in-



quire, "in this nineteenth century, in this Christian land, do tribulation and persecution arise because of the word?" Precisely as when Jesus uttered these words. And there is nothing more striking about the Scriptures than that, while their garb is so Oriental, so Jewish, their statements should be so universally true. Society has utterly changed its forms; human nature has undergone immense changes; and yet this parable of the sower is in every feature as applicable in Boston to-day, as in Capernaum eighteen hundred years ago. Whoever will enter into the kingdom of heaven will find social embarrassments in his way; tribulations; bruising of the spirit; persecutions, not so much of the axe as of the stiletto. If you go toward heaven, the world will rub hard against you; for it is going the other way, with an immense momentum in its current.

Its example will make the service of God difficult. No man can be intimately associated with others, without at times coming to a point where his principles and those of his friends will be tested. There are some things that the principles of one allow, which the principles of the other forbid. Not, indeed, that this is true of religious principles only. Now, one or the other must prevail in such an encounter. If worldly persons who cannot see that the saving of their souls is a matter of supreme moment, act out their feelings, it must sometimes draw strongly and painfully upon the social feelings of one who means to serve God. And if his love to God is sincere; if his sense of spiritual things is genuine; if he is in earnest to save his soul, he will be pained by the struggle to resist the influence of a worldly example. But there he overcomes the world by faith. He looks beyond what is seen and

temporal. He sees redemption in its reality and magnitude ; his own evil heart ; the world rushing to destruction ; the judgment hastening ; the Word of God rebuking and warning men ; and thus he conquers. But if he be superficial ; if the seed have fallen in a rocky soil ; this is the rising of the sun, before which he withers, and shows that there never was any deepness of earth. The scorching sun is here placed for the difficulties and trials of a religious life. If all our religion consisted in sitting in church, to hear sermons and praise God, in getting a kind of hope that Christ will save you, then it were not through warfare that we are to reach heaven. But, as the case is, we are to go out into this every-day world, and try our spirits in the struggle of life. And God has declared that we are to be tried ; nay, has bidden us rejoice that we are tried. The trial is not so severe as that of the final judgment ; but severe enough to show to ourselves, always, and generally to others, what we are ; so that we need not go to that dread interview to be disappointed.

True Christians always have gloried in tribulations. It is one of their marks. False Christians, on the contrary, cannot bear them. From the beginning they bargained for holding with the Church and the world ; and when the two separate from each other they are full of consternation. Their consciences are with the one, their hearts with the other. Satan is represented by our Saviour as making speedy work with the inattentive hearer. He comes straight down, before the man has put on his hat, and takes every word right out of his heart and head. But here he has to take a circuitous route, and be somewhat patient. The man in this case



has caught some of the seed. There are tender places in his conscience and his heart. There is some soil ; and the seed catches there, and holds. Now the master must play with other hands. The convert is full of joy. The world and he have turned their backs on each other. Yes, but there is a mental reservation ; he has compromised with his conscience ; agreeing that he may regard the loss of men's favor, of his comfort, his property, his life as a greater evil than retaining a wicked heart. And that is the secret unity that still exists between him and the world ; and therefore the example of the world will some day come upon him in such a way that he cannot bear the struggle.

Sometimes this influence will come in the form of argument. The world generally hates the doctrines of Christ. They have raised a hue and cry against doctrines, creeds, and bigotry. That indeed is now wearing out. Yet this is hard for one who has learned the doctrines on the mere testimony of God, to be pressed with difficulties he cannot solve. The world argues, too, against seriousness and against strictness in religion. And he is so much with the world in heart that he cannot answer their reasonings.

Ridicule is one of their formidable weapons. The sage Sydney Smith has remarked : " I know of no principle which it is of more importance to fix in the minds of young people, than that of the most determined resistance to the encroachments of ridicule. Give up to the world, and to the ridicule with which the world enforces its dominion, in every trifling question of manner and appearance ; for, it is to toss courage and firmness to the winds, to combat with the mass upon such subjects as these. But learn, from the earliest days, to

insure your principles against the perils of ridicule. If you think it right to differ from the times, and to make a stand for any valuable point of morals (or religion), do it, however rustic, however antiquated it may appear; do it, not for insolence, but seriously and grandly, as a man wears a soul of his own in his bosom, and does not wait until it shall be breathed into him by the breath of fashion." This is sound advice; and it would have been worth worlds to me and my school-fellows, to have understood it and practised it. But I believe nothing more effectually tests a superficial Christian than to have his opinions and peculiar principles ridiculed, and himself despised.

It requires root to bear the shining of that scorching sun. The true children of God have always gloried in tribulation, and taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods; as you see in the 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. Theirs is a religion, not of comfort, worldly ease and honor; but of sacrifice for Christ, for truth, holiness, and heaven. He however who makes nothing more of Christianity, Christ, grace, the Gospel and salvation, than the means of relief from present discomfort and future suffering, can never carry out the practical rules of Christ into daily life.

This subject furnishes a *warning to the preacher*; not to magnify the attractive above the painful features of the Gospel. Whoever does so, deceives his hearers. Mark our Saviour's preaching in this respect: not for the purpose of holding men's attention to suffering as the greatest evil, but to aim to secure in every hearer the adoption of principle, Christian principle. The root, though unseen, is the important part of the plant; giv-



ing to it both firmness and nourishment. Peter had that root ; and well for him that he had, in that tempest which shook off some of his finest branches, and blew away his glorious leaves of physical ardor, natural boldness, and self-confidence. He endured, because in his heart he held firmly to the infinite evil of sin, and the infinite preciousness of Christ. Immediate comfort and zeal are not the results to be sought by the preacher or the convert ; they may be superficial.

This subject shows us that apostasies are not the fault of the Gospel. Men receive it by halves ; and the half they take has not the root in it. So Demas received it ; but Demas forsook Paul, because he had no root.

This subject teaches Christians to rejoice in trials. The same sun that withers the superficial, strengthens the true Christian. Fire acts oppositely on gold and chaff. God's true children are "tried with fire."

## LECTURE XVI.

### THE SEED AMONG THORNS; OR, THE FATAL COMPROMISE.

MATT. XIII. 7, 22. “And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.” “He also that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.”

Now we have come to another part of the field, in which the soil does not lack adaptedness to the growth of the seed; for it has the power to grow two kinds at once. But the plough having gone over it too superficially, has cut down only the stems of the thorns, and left their roots. Since Adam's apostasy, thorns and thistles and noxious herbs have found the soil of the earth peculiarly congenial to their growth. Whether that were by a miraculous change in its nature, I will here not attempt to conjecture. But of the human heart we can speak by divine authority. The Word of God is to it an exotic plant, originating in heaven, supernaturally transplanted here. But the thorns of sin grow naturally and spontaneously, while grace thrives only by careful cultivation.

By the thorns which choke the good grain, the great Teacher meant to point out the various forms of worldly good which absorb the human affections, and



leave no place for him. He specifies them to be,—cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches, and desires of other things. They choke the growing grain. In other terms: *the love of the world neutralizes the Gospel.*

The two other cases we have been considering as the wayside and rocky ground hearers, presented respectively, the inattentive and the cowardly. The former had never awakened to a feeling which could make them realize that they had any interest in the Gospel. The latter had that effeminate spirit which seeks the crown without the cross. We are now introduced to another character, which we may denominate—the compromising. They strike hands with the Gospel; but with the world at the same time. They, like the others, take the Gospel for its promises, and reject its terms. The former compromised that the suffering for Christ should not be exacted in their case. These compromise in regard to enjoyment. They ordinarily are the same person; but it is not always the case. Some are willing to suffer for their soul's good, who are still unwilling to relinquish each rival to Christ.

The case has these prominent features:—there is, under the hearing of the Gospel, a partial suppression of worldliness. But the worldly desires gain an ultimate victory over the Gospel.

We shall be instructed by these parables just in proportion to the accuracy of our discernment in marking the points selected by our Lord for our special notice. This case must then be distinguished from others with which it might be easily confounded. It is not the worldling who never even deigns to regard

the claims of God and the destiny of his immortal nature ; for, he is a wayside hearer. Nor is it the cowardly spirit that is affrighted by nothing but suffering ; and sees nothing so hideous as the Saviour's cross, nothing so dreadful as his fiery baptism and his cup of bitterness. He is described by the rocky ground. The case now brought before us may be the same. But the distinction lies in the aspect of his character, which the attractions of the world detect. If it be the same kind of character, its apostasy takes place under different circumstances, and is caused by a different set of influences. He lives for a time a seemingly religious life ; and then yields his heart finally and for ever to something that is not his God and Redeemer.

Our attention then is first turned to,

#### I. THE PARTIAL SUPPRESSION OF WORLDLINESS IN HEARING THE WORD.

I had occasion in a preceding discourse to notice the scriptural use of the term—the World, as very remarkable. Not to repeat the words of our Saviour before cited, let us take up one passage from John's epistles : “ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For, all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father ; but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof. But he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever.” Here are definitions of it that cannot be misapprehended. Here is affirmed of it, that the love of it makes the love of God impossible. And a fleeting life is ascribed to it, passing like a shadow ; and



yet a shadow for which one has sold his birthright in the skies. Cares, riches, pleasures ; there they lie in our sight. Who knows their history, but He that has watched the game of human life with undiverted eye, now for nearly two hundred generations ? There they lie for us to survey them, and recall what they have done ; yea, what they are doing at this moment. Choking thorns, at this very moment found in hearts here that beat warm with the pulse of life. Suppressed enough in their activity, in some instances, to allow this holy doctrine of grace to enter and germinate, and take root, and spring up ; but alas ! growing at the same pace unheeded, and so unchecked, until it shall be found that their earthly nature is so much better suited to this earthly climate, that they will blight the tender plants of heaven in their shade, rob their roots of nourishment, and ultimately remain masters of the field ; a field of thorns, thistles, and briars !

We are then first to account for it, that one should retain his love of the world, and at the same time give even a partial entertainment to that Gospel, its deadly antagonist. Two circumstances will explain it.

1. *The attention of the mind is, for the time, diverted from the world.* Human consciousness follows the will and sensibilities. It takes no cognizance of deep, underlying principles in the heart. They may be master-principles, giving to the character its every distinctive feature, and shaping the whole current of action ; and yet, under particular circumstances, they shall be to the soul's consciousness, annihilated. This law of the mind is of the first magnitude ; and yet human history is filled with the delusions which men practise on themselves by overlooking it. One illus-

tration of it shall satisfy us. When the ardent, honest Peter declared to Christ that he would follow him to prison and to death, he was conscious of feeling just what he uttered. But there lay slumbering in his soul at that instant, a coal that needed but the breath of persecution to fan it into a flame, which should nearly consume him. His compassionate Lord saw it there. It was the natural love of life, yet unchastened by the supreme love of Christ.

Now men may have no consciousness that they are governed by a love of the world; and may readily embrace the hopes of the Gospel, under an impression of their entire sincerity and earnestness in doing it, while at the same time their hearts cling to the created sources of enjoyment, with a tenacity strong as the desire of happiness and dread of misery can make it. The first reason of this temporary ascendancy of the Gospel, and of their delusion in regard to its completeness, is: the strong impression which is, for the time, made on the sensibilities. It may come in various forms. One is—a temporary disgust with the world. This has deceived thousands; for this very disgust derives its acuteness from the strength of that affection which is disappointed. The man who has calmly looked behind every mask the world wears, long recognized the hollowness of its pretensions, and the falseness of its promises, is the very farthest from any paroxysm of disgust. He has been accustomed to consider a thorn a thorn; and if by any inattention he leaned his hand upon it, and it pierced him, he only reproaches himself for his heedlessness, and walks thereafter more guardedly.

But here are your romancers, whose gravest occupation in youth was the day-dream. They studied the



world through their fancies and their favorite writers. And, on some dark day a storm arises, and lightnings strike the cherished tree on which grew their heart's fondest hopes. In an instant its blossoms wither ; its leaves are scattered ; its shattered trunk alone remains. And to the heart's moanings there is no response but sullen thunder, howling wind, and roaring floods. Such has the world become in one day to some that most fondly cherished, most devoutly worshipped it. Now the love of the world, as a principle, may remain entirely unshaken by all this violence. Only for the time it ceases to flow in its accustomed channels. Ask the sufferer how the world now appears. The reply is—"disgusting." And now if the gentle tones of mercy are heard floating down from some soft harp on Zion's hill, it is not wonderful that it should strike a deep, responsive chord in that lacerated heart. The seed of the kingdom drops upon a mellow soil, and springs up with great promise. Yes, but the ploughing was not thorough. The tops of the thorn-bushes are cut down ; But the roots and the seeds are there still ! It is not enough to kill the worldliness of our hearts, that we should find ourselves cheated by the world. Another form is the sadness caused by slighted affections. Many a worldly heart pretending to forsake the world, has carried the thorns of worldliness to a monastery, because a blighting frost of selfish indifference had cut down their blossoms and their stems.

There is a sudden discovery of unfaithfulness in men, which makes others turn to religion for relief.

Some grow weary of waiting such tedious years for the world to realize the golden schemes it pictured to the youthful fancy ; and they become religious.

Some become misanthropic from envy at others' success. Their religion partakes always of the sullenness, moroseness, and misanthropy in which it originated.

Some grow weary of the world in each specific form, because they have exhausted every fountain it contains. And in this satiety, not less worldly, but demanding a change, they turn to the Gospel. These are forms of disgust, which, for the time, divert the attention from the world; but do not necessarily, nor certainly, destroy the love of it.

Then the ascendancy of the world may also be temporarily checked by convictions which go deeper than impressions of disgust. The folly of ambition, of covetousness, of fashion, of a life of pleasure, sometimes flashes on the mind, like a friendly beam from heaven. In an instant the whole matter lies before the mind's eye; and the man exclaims: "What a fool I am, to spend my life thus! To what end am I toiling; what do all I enjoy, all I expect, amount to, at last!" And he resolves to begin life anew. He seems weary of the world. But he is not the first who had fits of dissatisfaction with a service, which, after all, nothing could bribe him to quit. There are, too, deep convictions of guilt in the sight of God; fearful openings of the past as it is going to be reviewed in the future; forebodings of a day which shall scatter illusions, and reveal the holy government of God in a majesty, purity, and inflexibleness which shall leave no room for hope to any but the truly penitent.

All this so fills and occupies the mind, that the world fades away, as a taper light at sunrise. And the world seems not to be loved, simply because it is not now an object of thought.



There may be also an awakening of the natural religious sensibilities, which overpowers temporarily all conscious desires of worldly good. The thought of God may swell up in the soul as from an infinite abyss; rising and expanding, until every other object is annihilated. How awful, how glorious is his being, his perfection, his duration, his thought, his purpose, his government! When the mind begins to conceive of it, the world shrinks away, until it is lost in its infinite littleness. The thought of opposing him seems preposterous; the thought of losing his favor is insupportable. To be his child; to be in covenant with him; to love, and be loved; to praise and serve him; to commune with him; to dwell with him for ever! Before these considerations the mind cannot retain its active attachment to the world. Whatever love remains, must slumber like the love of mirth, in the chamber of the dying.

And so too there are thoughts of the saints, of men who have loved God, and men who now love him, which make the covetous Balaam exclaim: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

There are glimpses of heaven, too, which stifle worldly affections. "Shall I be there? How happy, how holy, how blessed! Shall I be there?" No man can make that inquiry, with serious thought, and not suppress, for the time, each worldly desire.

This is the first part of the explanation. The other may be more briefly despatched. Not to accuse any man of wilful hypocrisy, I am attempting to show how one may retain his love to the world, and yet imagine he has no such love. Thus far we have seen the mind

so diverted to other and contrasted objects, that the mere absence of worldly goods from the attention would account for its suspended attachment to them. Another solution is :

2. *The Gospel is taken up, without reference to its opposition to the world.* It does indeed seem surprising, that any one with ordinary discernment, can meet the Son of God any where, or his Gospel in any part, and not see, that neither he nor it are of the world ; that the world is not of him ; that the world knoweth him not ; that to follow him, we must go “without the camp,” and walk in a narrow and unpopular path ; being “a peculiar people,” “crucified to the world, and the world to us.” But it is just so. Men do regard themselves as religious, who never formed one definite idea as to the peculiar spirit of the Gospel, and its unworldly features. And that they do, we need no other evidence than this part of the parable. Here were grains that actually took root and grew ; but they never reached maturity, for the thorns of care, riches and pleasure choked them, and they came to nothing. Now, unless all such persons deliberately take up religion to make a mock of it, while they pretend to seriousness, we must believe that they are utterly mistaken in regard to its nature and requirements ; they have neither formed a definite idea what the Scriptures mean to describe as the world, nor of their opposition to it.

Some become religious by embracing a theory ; others by feeling sad, and then happy ; but if they have not forsaken the world, they will not be religious enough, nor long enough to “bear fruit to eternal life.” There are thorns in the ground, which will



yet effectually choke every religious sentiment and purpose.

We now proceed to consider this second stage :

## II. THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF THE WORLD OVER THE GOSPEL.

“He also that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word ; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word ; and he becometh unfruitful.”

We are here to observe the feebleness of the religious principle, and the strength of the worldly principle.

1. *The feebleness of the religious principle.* It sprung from transient causes. If these causes had been made merely occasions, it would have been well. But it remained a thing of impulse, and did not become a matter of principle. You ask, what should have been done by him who was disgusted with the world, weary of its burdens, tired of its pleasures ; or by him on whom the light of God’s person and law had shone ; or him who saw the beams of eternity’s light thrown on earth’s dark path ? He should have struck the blow that would have emancipated him from the world. To describe that blow, I would resolve the love of the world into its first element,—a lie ; a malignant falsehood, forged in the regions of thickest night ; conceived in the breast of a being so foul, so murderous, so deceitful, that men are doubtful if such can be. That grand, rebellious, blasphemous, polluting, soul-destroying error is : “Man can be happy without the favor of God, and without loving God.” That once believed, then the natural excellence with which God has endowed his

creatures; and the thousand sources of inferior good which he designed they should contain, are eagerly embraced by the soul. It has abandoned God, and yet must fill its insatiable longings for enjoyment, as well as it then can. Having lost the infinite, it must make the most it can of the finite; getting in quantity as much as possible; and filling up by the imagination what is wanting in the reality.

Now here is the turning-point. If the soul in that state of suspension and transition, had renounced the lie, and embraced with the inmost strength of its belief, the truth, that God is its portion, and the world an infinitely inferior good; God's promise is true; the world's questionable, often false; then might it have died to the world as Paul did, and have risen with the Son of God to a new life. Here is the turning-point between faith and worldliness; the belief either that God, or the world is the soul's portion. At whatever point short of a right decision of that question in the inner heart, the soul stops, its religion is a shallow stream, without a fountain; feeble, however impetuous; short-lived, however promising.

Then, when we add to this feebleness of the religious principle,

2. *The strength of the worldly principle*, the case is fully, though painfully solved. And to judge how strong it is, we may remember, that there is in man a mysterious native bias. Call it original sin, or reject that title; yet, there it is. Man is not naturally, or spontaneously, or generally inclined to God. Stop the first godly man that you meet to-morrow in the street, and ask him, whether he was accustomed from the first, and naturally, to delight in God or in the world. His



answer will be : "Oh, I was worldly, and not godly." Ask the second, and he will tell you the same ; that, from his early childhood, solitary prayer and communion with God were his task, if performed at all. Play, toys, eating, fun, seeing sights, were the fountains of his happiness. I remember but two men who profess to be pious, that deny the existence of an evil heart in themselves. And yet the memory of one of them was manifestly biassed by a theory ; for a college friend of his assured me he was manifestly converted in a revival, when a student. Well now, if it be so with the godly, then what shall we say of the ungodly ? Shall we wickedly contradict the testimony of the Most High ? shall we vainly conceal from ourselves our own misery, instead of fleeing to those outstretched arms that proffer relief ; to that sympathizing heart that will not upbraid nor reject, but tenderly regard our necessities and our fears ? I turn your attention to the native disposition of the human heart. Man begins his moral existence, believing this fundamental falsehood ; that his happiness must come from things seen and temporal. And hence, the energy that should be given to prayer, to seeking God, to holy meditation, to the study of the Scriptures, is given to amusement, to business, to cultivating the friendship and favor of man. Now I will maintain no theory, about which there is room for difference of opinion ; but take the simple, fearful, unquestionable fact of this tendency in man, to show that unless religion, when embraced, be a principle ; unless it consist partly, in detecting, and from the depth of the soul, renouncing that great lie which is at the basis of all worldliness, there can be no permanence. That man's religion is a garment, put on because it is

just then in fashion in his circle ; a cloak gathered around him for the occasion of a stormy day ; but easily and certainly thrown aside under milder skies. Now, if to this native bias to worldliness, be added the power of habit, the reason becomes more manifest still why so many religious impressions are transient. The nature of habit is such, that if a person under its influence abstains from the first repetition of the accustomed act, mental or bodily, he may conquer it with comparative ease ; but the first step in the old direction, commits the whole body to a slippery declivity, where there is no foothold, and no power of resistance. The slaves of alcohol declare that so long as they keep entirely aloof from their insidious foe, they have very little difficulty in reconciling themselves to soberness. But one taste, even the odor of spirits, revives the slumbering appetite ; and they and their resolutions sink like Pharaoh and his hosts, as lead in the sea. Total abstinence is their strength. But what if one of them should still believe that, after all, his happiness was in the cup, and nowhere else ? Then he is lost. Unless you can disabuse him, there is no recovery. Just parallel to this is the case of the worldly heart. It matters not what changes are made, so long as that one change is not made, the power of habit will overmaster the superficial convictions and impressions which have induced this appearance of piety. The soul cannot conquer its own worldly propensities and habits, until it comes to believe most deeply and entirely that God is its portion ; and his creatures the mere instruments of his goodness. This is the creed that is indispensable to salvation. That is the orthodoxy without which



every soul must perish, let its doctrinal creed be sound or false.

But we have not yet surveyed the whole ground. To this native bias, and power of habit, must be added : the direct power of the world. There is no creature of God, that is not, in itself, good. Aaron Burr was good, if you look at his being as a man, his endowments as a man of genius. But he was one of the most pernicious and dangerous men of his age. How ? By perversion. He believed that he could be happy by neglecting God, and indulging his ambition and his appetites. And he gave to that creed the energies of a powerful and brilliant mind. But did he corrupt such men as President Dwight ? No ; for they did not believe in him, nor his great falsehood. They regarded him as a creature of God made for great and good purposes. But they regarded him as perverted from that use, and employed by the enemy of all good for his nefarious purposes. Many, however, to their dreadful cost, if not their ruin, believed in him ; courted his favor more than God's ; and they were undone. Now the world is, like this man, a good creature of God ; but, like him, it has come under the power of evil. It is perverted. When Satan would destroy our race, he did not present himself in person, and hold up evil in its nakedness ; and say : there, take that poison for its own sake ; there, sin, for the sake of sinning. He appeared in a borrowed form, and put the moral poison in a harmless creature. There you have his whole policy. He has never invented any thing deeper than that. He has applied it in ten thousand forms. But that is his policy. His victory over our great ancestors, lay in producing the conviction, that something

ing of their goods. The true victor is one who prefers to lose the right hand or the right eye, rather than God's favor. He would rather die than do wrong.

Moses "counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt—choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of *sin* for a season." We see here

*The intense interest of a mind's religious history.* A child receives religious instruction. At the same time in his heart remains a bias, a wrong habit; a great falsehood is believed by him.

By and by comes the contest. First, there is an intelligent abandonment of the world; then a steady conquest of this native bias by faith in Christ. Or, there is a yielding to Satan's doctrine; "The world is necessary to my happiness." The strength of the soul is then given to the world. The rest of the heart furnishes a poor, thin soil for God's truth.

How many characters apparently destined to great energy, become feeble by being absorbed in little objects! How many noble souls become shallow, for want of truth in the heart! "Behold, thou requirest truth in the inward parts."

The case of the backslider is here illustrated. He lacked, from the beginning, a full belief of the world's emptiness; as also a sufficiently definite consciousness of the native bias to evil, and of the power of habit confirming that tendency. There was wanting, consequently, sufficient vigilance and faithfulness to guard against temptation. Satan always parleys with the traitor in the castle.



Here we see also the duty of the worldly-minded. "Break up your fallow ground ;" kill the thorns, or they will kill you ; for we are here told what will be the issue with those persons, in whose hearts only thorns and thistles grow. Their end is, "to be burned."

besides God; something independent of God; something in opposition to God, was essential to complete their happiness. The parable gives us, as reported by Luke, three forms in which the world neutralizes the power of the Gospel,—care—riches—and the desire of other things.

There is a care which becomes us as endowed with forethought. In itself, not wrong, it must be wrong as soon as it comes under the control of that practical falsehood which is the key-stone of Satan's empire. The care for the morrow which Christ forbids, when he points us to the ravens and the lilies, is that which proceeds from our being alienated from God, and doubting his kindness. The poor feel it, the rich feel from it. Every human being must feel it, when he recognizes his own inability to control those things in which he has placed his happiness. Itself a sin, it begets sin. It fills the mind with so many vain desires, perplexing thoughts, and wicked purposes, that God's holy word can find no permanent entertainment there.

The deceitfulness of riches is another thorn, or choking weed. If one sets out to make the mere acquiring property a supreme end, he will be deceived, and cheated out of happiness and heaven. Every step he takes is but acting out his ungodly principle, his belief in a falsehood. Some men make success in business their God. It is not so much property, as the getting it, in which they regard happiness to lie. Whoever makes that his end, must stifle whatever religious principle and feelings he has. The making riches themselves an end of pursuit, appears to some very wise and supremely important. They too are deceived. And they find it impossible to keep the heart fixed



on both worlds. He that will gaze on the earth, cannot see the heavens. "No man can serve two masters." Some, who have no riches, nor the prospect of them, make the appearing to be rich an indispensable means of happiness. And in their hearts and homes the thorns grow thick and strong. Some make their happiness consist in selfish expenditures. They fill their time, their minds, their hearts so full, that religion must sleep in the streets; they have no room for its entertainment.

Then an innumerable host of interests, objects and passions, are included under the phrase—the lust of other things. But we have gone far enough to see this principle established—that the mastery of one worldly desire over the human heart, will effectually neutralize all the power of the Gospel. The evidence of it is in the fact, that the prevalence of that desire proves the complete delusion of the soul on a vital point. And every indulgence of the desire strengthens the soul's aversion to God. Now, as the whole power of the word consists in its showing us that Christ alone can satisfy the soul, and is willing to be its portion, that word loses its power wherever the world is taken or sought for the soul's portion. The thorns must choke the good grain, and make it fruitless.

*We see in this and the preceding part of the parable, where Satan's strength lies.* The pains of duty and the pleasures of sin are the cords with which he binds men, and leads them captive. Hence those who have conquered him, are distinguished by preferring painful duty to pleasant sin. The Lord himself despised the cross; enduring the shame. The martyrs counted not their lives dear. The confessors took joyfully the spoil-

*requirement.* Why are impenitent persons so undisturbed in their self-complacency when contemplating God as holy, or as their final Judge? He has, they admit, placed man under law; and his law is holy; sometimes indeed above their attainments and performances. But they have always intended "to do about right." When the voice of Divine authority is heard from Sinai's top, it never disturbs them, so conscious are they of intending to obey. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," is the command. "I go, sir," is the prompt reply. But do they go? or, in other words, is their obedience such as the Lawgiver can acknowledge? No; for they do not even intend to render obedience to God's law, but to one of their own invention.

The law of God requires nothing short of spiritual perfection. And whoever is professing to render perfect obedience to that, should certainly understand the ground he occupies, and the attitude in which he presents himself before his Judge. Many men would shrink from professing to be Christians, but they have no hesitation in professing sufficient goodness to take them to heaven. But this is self-deception; for, they no more intend by that promise that they will become perfectly holy, from this instant, than they intend to make a journey to the moon. And it is just as absurd and more wicked to promise the former than the latter. They do not mean to render a full obedience of the heart and inmost soul to all God's requirements. But the demand of his law is chiefly on the heart. They however intend only an outward obedience. Love is the only morality that God approves; love to himself, so intense and universal, that it employs the whole



mind, heart, soul and strength. Unregenerated man has no morality that approaches to even the semblance of this form of goodness. What love have the most amiable and upright people who hope to be saved by the law? They love their kindred, their friends, with strong affection. They are attached to their party, their country; and have a general good will to mankind. But that loving his neighbor *as* he loves himself, who does it? That neighbor includes many people that have very disagreeable qualities; people that hate us; people that will injure us if they can. That love will tax our sympathies, our time, our prayers, our purse. It will often severely try us, by being totally unrequited. It will, if real, enter into all our business transactions, our domestic arrangements, our intercourse with men. It will make us unlike all the people that are living mainly for themselves. Blessing others becomes, under its control, the business of life, to which all other business is only an aid. Who loves his neighbor as himself? who dares to say to his Master issuing this command—I go, sir? Who dares reply to his Judge accusing him of sin—I always have obeyed this law? Who dares reply to his God requiring perfect obedience to his holy law from this moment—I will do it? The law, moreover, requires obedience to God, and to no other authority. Here all self-righteous men are utterly at fault. They regard conscientiousness as embracing the whole of man's religious nature. But conscience is, in two respects, not designed to be the leading faculty of the mind. It is not a voluntary faculty; and, therefore, is as much a mere instinct as any other impulse. And it is neither a being to be supremely loved, nor a sovereign to be

## LECTURE XVII.

### THE TWO SONS; OR, SELF-RIGHTEOUS OBEDIENCE.

MATT. XXI. 28-32.—“But what think ye; a *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”

Thus far we have followed the great Sower, in his want of success. And as He himself is our guide, we are sure not to have exaggerated. The next step would be, to contemplate his success. But as other parables present still varied aspects of disobedience to the Gospel, we now consider them; reserving the consideration of the seed sown in good ground. We have seen three causes of failure in the hearing of the Gospel; heedlessness, cowardice, and compromise. Another is self-righteousness, or a false obedience. The Pharisees were so distinguished for that, that even the wickedest of their nation were more obedient to John the forerunner,



and to the Lord himself, than they. To set their conduct in the right light, he thus addresses them:

“What think ye; a certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said; Son, go, work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said: I will not; but afterward he repented and went.” What think ye of that? It was very wicked in that son to reply thus to a father’s command. And yet, hear the rest of the story. “He came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said: I go, sir, and went not.” Now tell me what you think of that? You despise these publicans that once lived in unmasked iniquity; and yet, they are repenting, and returning to their duty. These degraded women, who have formerly made no pretensions to obedience, have now turned, at the preaching of John, and become truly obedient to God; while you, whose professions and pretensions are continually repeating: “I go, sir,” have never yet begun to do the will of God.

The son who said: “I go, sir,” did not mean to please his father. He simply intended to please himself by not working; and, at the same time, to stand well with himself, by professing obedience. Startle not at the folly of this management. It is repeated every day. It will be repeated under this sermon; with almost absolute certainty.

My first object is, to show,

# I. THE FALSE PROMISES OF OBEDIENCE, WHICH MEN MAKE TO THEIR CREATOR.

The first case I mention is that of,

1. *Persons always meaning, in their promise, a different law from that to which God refers in his*

obeyed. Being merely conscientious is the religion of the best men who know not God and Christ. Determining to act in all things according to the strictest rule of right, is, in God's family, just what it is in any human family. Suppose a son determines to obey his conscience. Now, if he means, by that, to love and obey his father, then he intends right, but calls it by a wrong name. If he means any thing else by it, his very goodness is filial disobedience. As some men practise and commend conscientiousness, it is atheism. The starting-point of human goodness is in trusting, loving, and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. Any conscientiousness, therefore, which does not begin with that, is wholly wrong, because it is a compromise on a fundamental point of duty ; and intending to obey conscience, but not God, is such a compromise.

How is it then with their religion, if it stands thus with their morality ? Multitudes of well-informed people live their lives through in a vital delusion as to the nature and essential principles of Christ's instructions, and their relations to religion. They regard themselves however as quite religious ; sufficiently so for all practical and eternal purposes. And this delusion they practise on themselves by,

2. *Inventing a gospel to take the place of Christ's Gospel ; just as others substitute their own law for his.* In Christ's Gospel there is a full recognition of the law in all the extent, purity, rigidness, and constancy of its demands. Penitence is the first requirement of the Gospel ; because the law is good, and we all have disobeyed it. A broken heart is the sacrifice it requires, because the law is good, and we are bad. Faith in Christ is the second great requirement of the Gospel,



because we have no righteousness that can honor the law; and we must present to the law another righteousness, which is made over to us, that we may reinstate the law in all its majesty and beauty before our own consciences, and in all its rightful authority before all who shall see us acknowledged as God's children, while our own obedience is as yet very imperfect, though sincere. But generally the self-righteous regard some parts of God's law as requiring too much of them, and other parts as superfluous. They cannot say with the sacred poet—"I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right." They fail also to recognize in the Gospel its full acknowledgment of the righteousness of the penalty of the law. Now no man is religious who does not cordially accept and obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But no man accepts that Gospel truly, who either objects to the threatenings of the law, and the declarations of the Scripture concerning the wrath of God; or, who denies his own guilty exposure to that wrath. Here must every faithful minister of Christ take his position, firm and inflexible. Men may conceive of a Gospel suited to their fancies and their feelings. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ declares that he came to save the lost. He finds us guilty of violating the law, wicked in our hearts; and so, ruined and helpless. If we do not start with the Gospel in this its first lesson, let us not pretend that we are religious in any thing we do; for if we were Christians on such terms, we should be Christians without Christ.

They fail to recognize another feature of the Gospel:

There is no atonement in obedience. The struggle of the human heart is, to make amends for its trans-

gressions, to pay its moral debt. But on no point is the Gospel more firm than on the utter impossibility of effecting that. Christ made a full atonement, which is offered to us, with all the advantages, immunities, rights, privileges and profits that may pertain to it. To accept of that as the peace-offering to our own awakened and threatening consciences ; to present that in faith before our Judge as the ground of our complete and eternal forgiveness ; to guard with a jealous care our simple, grateful dependence upon Christ as our atonement, our mediator, our life ; that is the faith, the believing on which the Gospel so much insists. But all self-righteous persons aim to keep their accounts with heaven balanced at least, if not always somewhat in their own favor, by the mere quality and quantity of their own innocence and excellence.

There is then one other specimen of the cases which our Saviour intended to describe by the son who said—  
“I go, sir, and went not.” It is,

3. *The promise of future obedience substituted for present obedience.* In this case there is a clear knowledge and full acknowledgment that the present course of life is wrong. There is also an acknowledgment that another is right ; and instead of entering immediately upon that course of repentance and obedience, there is a promise to do it at some future, undefined period. The whole process may then be thus described. The father says : “Son, go work *to-day* in my vineyard.” The son replies : “Father, I go, some time hereafter.” Then this son sets himself down as an obedient child, who, he cannot doubt, enjoys his father’s approbation. If any one regards himself as under the absolute law of God, and is aware that he does not perfectly obey



it, he acts like the second son when he defers to any future day the beginning of a perfect obedience. And he displays the same spirit, who knowing that it is vain to pretend to obey the law, and that we can be saved only by complying with the conditions of the Gospel, says, I will begin at some future time.

Now one effect of all these courses is, uniformly, this ; the person is satisfied with himself, and thinks he has taken a much more prudent course than those who openly trample on the law of God, and make no promise of future amendment. And they are strengthened in this conclusion by the fact that outward immorality and bold rejection of the Gospel are not only bad, but generally seen to be bad. But, dreadful as either of them is, the Saviour means to teach, in this parable, that

## II. THESE ARE THE MOST DANGEROUS FORMS OF DISOBEDIENCE.

This will be manifest when we consider,

1. *How they insult the omniscience, the holiness, and the grace of God.* That which distinguishes them from all other persons is, that while others do not pretend to obey God, these consider their disobedience obedience. Open vice and irreligion do not appeal to an omniscient God, and say, thou knowest me, and knowest that I am good. They neither think they can deceive him, nor ask his approbation of their conduct. But those of whom we are speaking, really believe either that God does not see through the shallow covering of their pretensions ; or else, that such goodness as theirs is pleasing to His holy eye.

Nor do the openly irreligious reject the grace of

God and all its provisions, because their own righteousness is a better ground of recommendation to God than the righteousness of Christ. But all who think they are pleasing God by obeying some other law than his, by performing some other conditions than those of his Gospel, or by promising to obey his Gospel at some future time, they are thus mocking and insulting the Holy One of Israel. Then, moreover,

2. *By thus quieting their consciences they make their own repentance more difficult and doubtful.* Follow the Saviour in his preaching-tours. Mingle with those groups of astonished listeners. Here we have an opportunity of seeing immoral men and self-righteous men brought together in presence of the Gospel. While Christ is preaching the Gospel and offering his salvation to men, not as righteous, but as sinners, he has publicans and sinners forsaking their sins to find a Saviour. But the Pharisees stand aloof. The sick came to the Physician; but the whole had no need of him in their own estimation. The rich young ruler was a specimen. He thought he had kept the commandments from his youth, and wondered what he could yet lack. Alas! he lacked every thing; for he had no sense of his needing Christ more than money. All his goodness had but nourished his pride.

When a man indulges in grosser sins, he knows he is doing wrong; and that by perseverance in them he may destroy every finer feeling of his nature, and make his recovery hopeless; but at the same time he is constantly enlisting his conscience against himself. But when one has brought his conscience to the level of his life, then he must be satisfied with himself. The one is laying up material which conscience may em-



ploy against him ; the other is enlisting his conscience on his side. No man ever came to Christ by a saving faith, so long as he felt that he was complete in himself. There is, therefore, no greater fault than believing ourselves faultless. And while immorality cannot be said in any sense to be preferable to morality, yet it shows how great an evil is a self-righteous goodness that is even a greater hindrance in coming to Christ, than immorality itself. It resembles the difference between a disease concealed in the system, yet working on toward death, and a disease bursting forth in painful and loathsome forms. They are both dreadful ; but the former is the least hopeful. The publicans and harlots will enter the kingdom of heaven, while Pharisees will perish in their imagined goodness.

Even religious sensibility, valuable as it is, may become a dangerous snare. Those who have quick religious sensibilities, are apt to become satisfied with enjoying the luxury of emotion. God approaches them in his commands. Duty is laid before them ; it is perfectly clear to them. "I ought to be this ; I ought to do that. I have lived in great negligence of my duty. It is alarming to be in such a condition. God is my Creator, and has an unquestionable claim on my obedience, and all his commandments are perfectly reasonable. It is perfectly clear that I ought to be a Christian. I have no excuse for neglecting to be." Thus the consciences of many are quickened. Thus they reason every time Christ, the Judgment, Death and Eternity are brought to mind. But there they stop. There they have been accustomed to stop, now for many years. They feel, feel even to trembling, at times. And nothing would alarm them more than the

loss of that feeling. But that is the round they run every time their consciences are aroused. Conscience, which was given to stimulate the active powers, is now indulged as a mere sensibility. The voice of God is heard—"Son, go work in my vineyard." The reply for ever is—"I ought to go." And there the matter ends. The religious feeling has come to form a resting-place to the soul. Sometimes other religious sensibilities are brought into exercise. The kindness of God ; the loveliness of Christ ; the value of God's favor ; the blessedness of dying in the Lord ; may awaken in the soul an intense desire. Christ says : "Son, go work in my vineyard to-day." The reply is : "Yes, sir, I wish to go." This state of feeling may be produced by an afflictive stroke of Providence. The heart bleeds, trembles and turns to its neglected God, and says : "I want to be a Christian." But it is not, and will not be one.

Thus the Gospel is rejected, either under the pretext of obedience to the law, or with a self-flattering promise of meeting its requirements at some future day.

It may here occur to some one to inquire whether this parable does not require doing instead of believing, obedience rather than faith. If they will candidly reflect on two passages of the Scriptures, they will be satisfactorily answered. In the one (John vi. 29) they will see that believing in Christ is the great act of obedience required by the Gospel. In the other (Rom. vi. 1-8) they will see that the faith in Christ which the Gospel requires, secures the sanctification as well as the justification of him who exercises it. And the



difference between the obedience of the self-righteous and that of the believer is, that the one has no obedience at all, for he has no love ; the other is constrained by “the love of Christ” to love in return. And this feeble love is the commencement of true obedience.

This evasive spirit may even follow a person into the Church. Nay, it is found in the visible Church as well as without its bounds. It is indeed one of the great sins of the Church ; encumbering the body with a large number whose religion is a name, without reality, without life, without any efficiency in promoting spiritual religion. Their example and spirit are infectious. If they are formalists, they hinder those who would be spiritual. If they love the world, they are a grief to those who have forsaken it ; and a stumbling-block to those who would forsake it, but for their spirit and example.

It prevents the efficient action of the Church. Christ has a vineyard ; and his desire is, that it shall be cultivated. He therefore appoints to each one the care of a section, and says to him, “Son, go work in my vineyard to-day.” This is a working universe. The idle are among Satan’s best workmen. But if any one neglects the work assigned him, then some sacred interest suffers. A vine is waiting for his care. If he neglects it, no one else will care for it. It may be his own heart ; or, some evil in the Church or world which he can help to remove ; or, some good interest to be built up. But these promisers that say so readily, “I go, Lord,” find the work sometimes very rough. There are in the Lord’s vineyard thorns and briers, mud, rocks, weeds, moles, foxes, insects, mildews, frosts, and

winds ! What a world is this then to work in ! And it is *constant* work. Every day something is to be done ; and so they neglect it ; yet see what is at stake. The king's revenue ; their own living ; others' life !

Yes, the consequences of this spirit of substituting something for obedience to Christ are lamentable, even to true Christians, just so far as they indulge in it. It produces that want of symmetry of character which now hinders Zion from putting on her beautiful garments. Where do you find a Christian that is not doing his Lord's work imperfectly ; all fail of obedience somewhere. Some are very fervent in their religion, but equally so in speaking unkind and uncharitable words. Some are diligent in business ; but that is not accompanied with being fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Some are better in church than on 'change, in the family or the workshop. Some will be very much like Christ in his meekness, but unlike him in his diligence in doing good. Some imitate his energy, but overlook his humility. Some are very active ; but not prayerful, as he was. Some have his social affections, but not his heavenly-mindedness in exercising them ; some, his benevolent regard for the body, but not his compassion for the soul. Some have his love to good men, but not his yearning, condescending, self-sacrificing love to the abandoned.

Now, in all this, my brethren, each of us is suffering a serious loss. It limits our communion with him. It hinders our usefulness to others. It deprives us of the honor of laboring for him. There is kept, in his house above, a complete list of all the laborers. He has permitted a few of those names to be copied, as samples, into the book of instructions for laborers sent down



here ; that we may be animated by their example and their honorable rewards. Moses' name is there. He was a great workman ; faithful in all his stewardship. Nehemiah's, Paul's, and many others. But if our obedience is only in words, our names are not inscribed in that honorable list. There are high wages, too, in this service : God's love ; angels' aid ; Christ's sympathy ; the Holy Spirit's aiding power and light ; Heaven at last ; and souls saved through our instrumentality ! But what a loss are idlers then suffering ! And besides the loss, how pernicious and dangerous is the habit they are contracting ! Dangerous, because it deceives ; pernicious, because it is a rejection of the Gospel under the guise of treating it respectfully. It answers to the command, with *good feelings* with the promise, "I go, sir ;" with *forms* of religion ; with *good wishes* and *good resolutions*.

And what can be said of its effects, on Christ himself ? One class indeed insults him by the contemptuous reply to his command : "I will not." But the other says : "I go ;" meaning at the same time the same thing as the others ! This grieves his heart ; this must at length exhaust his patience.

I can suggest one, and but one remedy for this dreadful evil. It is : an immediate cessation from the repetition of this act. Hear now the call of Christ with an honest heart. It is a call of authority, of affection, of urgent benevolence. "To-day," it says. It is special, and it is tender ; it is directed to you personally : "Son, go work in my vineyard." There is enough for all, and a specific employment for each. Hear the call with an honest heart.

Do you inquire what the work is ? It is not merely

to feel, to be convinced of sin, to become extremely religious, to wish well to religion, to purpose well for yourself; but it is coming to Christ as to one that loves you with infinite love, who alone can save you; who desires and requires you to seek his glory, and to do his will above all other things. Specifically, you are to live in him, conform your spirit to his, and use all your powers subordinately to his plans.

Do it now, and do it constantly; begin "*To-day.*"



## LECTURE XVIII.

### THE GREAT SUPPER; OR, THE INVITATION REFUSED.

LUKE XIV. 16-24—"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

THE Lord has seen fit to devote yet another parable to this fearful wickedness of rejecting his overtures of mercy. There have been many volumes published under the title of Table-Talk. But if one should be published, entitled: Our Redeemer's Table-Talk, it would differ strikingly from most others, not only in the wisdom of his remarks, but also in manifesting his supreme desire to benefit his hearers. This was a part of a conversation at the table where he was a guest;

and was suggested by a remark of some person present; probably a Pharisee, who took it for granted that he should be included in the number of the "blessed" who should "eat bread in the kingdom of God." To this remark the Lord replied in the words of this parable; in which he intended to show this person and all who heard his words, that they who do not sit down to "eat bread in the kingdom of God," will have only themselves to condemn. In the parable of the Two Sons we had a covert refusal of obedience to God's commands. Here we have open refusals to comply with his invitations, palliated by excuses. The first application of the story is, doubtless, to the Pharisees, who had heard the invitations of John the Baptist, and the Saviour. The Master was angry with their wicked rejection of his invitation. The anger of Christ seems never to have been called forth but by the self-righteous and hypocritical effrontery of those men. The second invitation was given by the apostles in the streets and lanes of Jerusalem and Judea. Then the messengers were sent to "the highways and hedges" of the Gentiles.

This scene is re-enacted in every period of modern history. The same kinds of excuses are still offered to conscience, and to the Saviour, for refusing to accept salvation on his conditions. One pleads the claims of business, and another the claims of society, or the difficulties arising from his social position.

Men still refuse to come to God's feast; and give their refusal as decent an appearance as they can. But the Master of the feast makes nothing of their excuses; indignantly regarding the refusal as a refusal. That is the point of supreme moment in this case; the refusal



to come to the feast of God's grace ; which is not diminished, but aggravated by the reasons assigned for it. Our subject is, therefore,

*God's invitation rejected, with apologies.* And I call you, first, to see when and how men refuse God's invitation.

### I. THE REFUSAL TO COME TO THE FEAST OF SALVATION.

Some regard the Scriptures as merely instructive ; some, as a general directory to the various duties of life. But this parable shows the Saviour's view of the Word of God. It declares that,

1. *There is a feast provided ;* and that by a very wealthy person ; and on a scale of great magnificence. A feast is designed to entertain our social feelings, by bringing together persons likely to be agreeable to each other ; and to supply our bodily wants in the most agreeable manner.

God has thus provided, on the most magnificent scale, for man's personal and social necessities. These we shall notice again more definitely.

2. *An invitation is sent forth.* No one can go properly to such an entertainment, but on an invitation. To invite to this feast has been one great part of the employment of God's servants in every age. And the parable gives a sketch of the history of these invitations. First, they were confined to one favored nation. When they treated it with utter indifference, then the message went forth to the nations whom they despised as "poor, maimed, halt, and blind." And then to show the generosity, condescension, and earnestness of the Master of the house, the servants are

commanded to go and search out the most remote and the most degraded persons they could find.

The invitation is put in very various forms ; always meaning to induce the same act on the part of the invited, and to proffer the same blessings on the part of the inviter. When Jesus says, "Come unto me ye that labor," he invites man to find an eternal peace to his soul, by a penitent confidence in Christ, and an affectionate obedience to him. It is a distinct offer of eternal life, on his part ; to be accepted by a distinct act on the part of him who needs that life. To repent of sin and believe in Christ, is going to the feast ; not to repent, nor to commit the soul to him, is refusing to go to the supper.

Now let us see why the Master of the house was angry ; or, in other words,

II. WHY GOD REGARDS HIMSELF INSULTED BY THIS REFUSAL, AND BY THE VARIOUS APOLOGIES THAT ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY IT.

1. *It is a contempt of our own highest good, and of God's richest bounties.* God is dealing with man on two different principles ; by confounding which, men are perpetually making most fatal mistakes. There are blessings he bestows, without any reference to our treatment of him or them. He sends his rain upon the earth for the just and the unjust. To get enough bread you have only to be a good farmer, merchant, artificer, or laborer. To become rich, you need not come to Christ. But there are blessings suited to the profoundest necessities and the noblest capacities of your being, which can be had only by accepting this invitation. We certainly want food and raiment, and



money, and shelter, and a thousand things beside. But we all have wants that lie infinitely deeper in our being, and affect us in our vast connections with the universe of God, and with eternity. These wants unsupplied, the riches of the earth and the glory of an archangel could not satisfy us; we remain poor, poor indeed. Our great necessities may be comprised in three classes: we want a radical change in our relations, in our characters, in our prospects. Take our relations to the government and law of our Maker. They are terrible. Hear one utterance: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law, to do them." Then hear another: "There is no man that liveth, and sinneth not." Now we may hide that law, that government, that God, that sin from our eyes, as one may paint his pallid cheeks to hide the signs of wasting disease. But there it is; sleeping, waking, at home or abroad, in the shop or the sanctuary, that law ever holding its tremendous curse over man. The relations of every impenitent person to God are such, that if he could see them, he would give no sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids. His relations to Providence are such as would make him ashamed to receive another favor if he rightly understood them. God is supporting him as you support a base and dissipated son; without complacency, without satisfaction; only hoping he may possibly repent. His relations to Satan are fearful; because he is a servant pleasing Satan; is deceived by him, and enchained by him. His relations to the Gospel are painful; because it increases his responsibility by presenting duties which he only neglects; by revealing the love of God only to be spurned by him. His relations to Death, to Judgment,

and to Hell, are fearful. Is it wonderful that God himself should be affected by our miserable condition; and that when he has made a provision for our deliverance, which needs but the addition of our own compliance to make it fully ours, that he should earnestly desire us to comply?

Now the Gospel is a provision for our wants, as it proposes to change all these terrible relations. The moment we accept its offers the law ceases to curse; the Gospel becomes a covenant full of promises; Christ, a Saviour; God, a reconciled father; Satan is vanquished. Death is the beginning of life; judgment is coronation; hell is extinguished for you; earthly afflictions come; but their character is changed; property, friends, health may forsake; but your covenant with God will remain. Even that timid child who startles at the thought of death may come to this feast. She will find its guests to be the conquerors of death, who, while eating bread which angels never tasted, entertain each other with such songs as bacchanalians never could utter,—“O death, where is thy sting!”

Yes, the guests at this feast, once proscribed rebels, become the sons and daughters of the King. All heaven is leagued with them, for the King of heaven is now reconciled to them.

With this change in our relations, we need equally a change in our characters, our hearts, ourselves. Oh! who of us has never sighed as he looked up to the lofty heights of Jesus' character; nay, even to the purity of angels, and then turned his eye in upon himself! I pity the man who has; I tremble for him who has not. Mankind are divided into the self-complacent and the self-abhorring. To the former the Gospel has



no charm, except in the incidental portions which, as understood by them, flatter their vanity. They love those features of its lofty morality which they think they find reflected in their characters. But he that knows himself as God knows him, sighs and despairs as he recognizes the selfishness, the ungodliness, the spiritual insensibility that prevail there. In our unconverted state we found no love to God, no sympathy with the Saviour, the Holy Spirit, the saints of God, the Holy Scriptures. We were weary of praying; we saw ourselves unfit for heaven; unfit to associate with Gabriel and his companions; with patriarchs and apostles! And does God offer in the Gospel to change our hearts, our very characters? Yes, this is precisely the blessing promised. "Behold, I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." He then that accepts this invitation becomes a new being; not perfected in an hour, but sanctified perfectly at the end. The Saviour says: "First, the blade; then the ear; then the full corn in the ear."

We equally want a change in our prospects. This is involved in the others. Our relations are changed, our hearts are changed; therefore the future of time, and the future of eternity is changed to us. See the contrast. Let us make out two inventories and compare them. If you remain away from this feast, there is progressive sin; selfish labors and enjoyment; disobedience to God; a death of stupidity, or one of despair; the curse of the Judge; hell. If you come, there is

progressive holiness ; usefulness ; obedience ; peace or triumph ; his approbation ; heaven, eternal heaven !

Here are some of the reasons of God's earnestness. There are more. Besides what so directly concerns us as individuals, there are social arrangements most important to us. A feast is not a mere enjoyment of what is eaten and drunk ; it is also a fellowship of kindred spirits. Here is a glorious company. In accepting the invitation, we of course leave, in a very important sense, all those who do not accept it. This is often a severe trial. But we may be sure of this, that no companionship would make us blessed in the future world, that is not founded upon mutual love to God. Whomsoever we leave, we come to the best society of earth and heaven, the élite of the universe, the princes and nobles of God's kingdom, the sages of the Church ; the heroes of God's wars ; the architects of Zion ; the fellowship of the martyrs, the apostles, "the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven ;" the noblest, the loveliest spirits the world has ever seen ; God's elect, for whom angels and archangels have watched and fought. Yes, here is a holy company ; and the King at the head of the feast. The music of the entertainment is performed by the harpers and singers of the eternal city.

God, my friends, God our Maker, our Redeemer, wants us to come in, because it is so joyous, so serenely blessed to be at that banquet.

And as we are assured by the provider, every thing is in profusion. When the millions of our race shall be all seated, there will be room and provision for as many millions more. Here is the outpouring of divine goodness. The love of God here exercises and exhibits



itself. Here are given to us exceeding great and precious promises. Here are the bread that cometh down from heaven; the waters, and the wines of heaven; fruits of the promised land. Nay, love itself is the costly provision of this banquet; and that love is declared to be unsearchable in its dimensions, inexhaustible in its resources. Can there then be any room to question whether a cause, a sufficient cause exists, for God himself earnestly to invite us to this banquet!

What is man's refusal then, but a contempt for his own highest good, and God's richest provision for his necessities? This refusal moreover involves,

2. *A contempt of the kindness of God expressed in the provision, and in the invitation.* The whole provision was spontaneous. No necessity compelled our beneficent Creator to make it. No demands of justice held him to it. No urgency on our part constrained him. It is the purest expression of love that God probably ever made; that angels, men, or devils ever witnessed. To look on it, and be unmoved, is to despise the very heart of God; the tenderest, deepest, most paternal of his affections.

It was more than spontaneous; it was a costly provision. How much it cost, I do not know. Gabriel does not know. I hope we may hereafter confer with him upon it; and for ever be getting grander and profounder conceptions of the cost of this feast. Yet we shall never be able to compute it. We only know that nothing but God's love could have made such an expenditure for the good of such a creature as man.

And we see in the whole history of this invitation an expression of the earnestness of the Master of the

house. The feast required a gradual preparation. Great principles are involved in saving sinners, with which something more than mere creative power has to do. And as the preparation advances, the invitation is spread over a broader field. Noah and Enoch and Lot addressed it to their neighbors. Then a nation received it. To them for long centuries a race of messengers was sent, perpetually entreating them to accept of God's salvation. Isaiah cries, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. And he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Then, when the feast was fully prepared; the message was despatched to the ends of the earth. And to this day, the messengers are still acting under this commission; "Go ye unto all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." This world-wide extent of the invitation shows the earnestness of the inviters. So does the frequent repetition of it. It lies in every part of the Bible; and that is going with increasing rapidity throughout the world. The preachers are multiplying; and they are, every Sabbath and oftener, repeating it to men. Then the earnestness of the messengers shows the same thing. Not now to select those men who most fulfil their mission, I look at two of the messengers. One was the Lord himself. And it is to the laboriousness, the tenderness, the tears, the words of Jesus I would point, to show that God is earnest in giving this invitation. "Compel them to come in," are the words which he represents the lord of the feast as using concerning the invited. And the reason he



assigns, is, "That my house may be filled." "All things are ready," he says. "Come unto me all ye that labor." In the last, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

I point you likewise to the Holy Spirit. He urges home upon the hearts of men this invitation, with an earnestness, to which each of us perhaps can bear witness.

Can any doubt that God is gratified when men accept his invitations! Look at the father of the Prodigal Son. Does not God rejoice over his guests? Can any doubt that he is grieved, nay, insulted by a refusal! "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me," is his language. "Oh Jerusalem, that thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belong to thy peace." I have called, and ye refused; I also will laugh at your calamity." "The master of the house was *angry*," Jesus says, at the refusal.

Here then are evidences abundant, of the earnest sincerity with which men are invited to the Gospel-feast. He seeks to gratify his love in our happiness.

With what emotions then should we turn from this survey of God's kindness to contemplate man's indifference and careless refusal! But does man refuse to be a guest at such a feast; reject the invitation from such a source, and cast away such blessings? All that is true. And this parable is designed to call our attention to the dreadful fact; and to show, moreover, that to this insult of refusal, man adds,

3. *That of vindicating his refusal by frivolous apologies.* Some men refuse this invitation, from sheer indifference; others, from indecision. To accept God's

invitation, we must prize the blessings he offers, at something of their relative, if not their absolute value. Every thing must yield to the duty of going to the feast. In other words, to accept the salvation offered in the Gospel, we must see its supreme importance, and cordially comply with its conditions. But some find its gracious offers awaken not the slightest desires in their heart. Such persons do not offer any excuse. Neither fear of the wrath of God, nor desire of his favor ; neither a view of their own deformity or the Redeemer's excellence ; draw them, in the least degree, toward him ; therefore they simply pass the whole by, as a matter of no moment to them. Others, however, feel both the responsibility and the privilege that invitation produces. And yet, not yielding to it, they must frame some reason plausible to themselves, and to others, without much reference to God's opinion of it. We accordingly see that such persons, in order to justify themselves, invent excuses, which they must know do not satisfy God. Probably no one directly admits that he is refusing the invitation of God ; and yet in doing it, there is such a consciousness of wrong that some plausible reason must be pleaded. It may be of incalculable value to such persons to have their apologies distinctly held to their own view ; and to see them in their true light, stripped of the illusions of a deceitful heart. The men invited to the feast, did not make a direct refusal. They set duty against compliance. They were not going to the feast ; that was the settled decision. Then the next consideration was, what to do with the invitation. And in each case there was a reason given for refusing it. If it had been a good reason, then their conduct would have been reasonable ;



but as it was not in either case, therefore it only gave their conduct the appearance of reasonableness. No man is willing to see his conduct to be contrary to sound reason; yet very few are careful to avoid having it so. There was likewise the influence of fear in the case. They were unwilling to make an utter breach with the distinguished maker of the feast.

These are precisely the influences which induce men to make excuses for not accepting God's invitation; and they are just as delusive. Let us compare them together.

These invited persons hoped not to make an utter breach with the lord of the house by their refusal. But they did. Their excuses passed for idle breath with him, as they should have done. The refusal remained a naked fact, stripped of these veils; an entire insult to his friendly and generous feelings and intentions. He was angry, Christ says. And we know whom he meant to describe in that. So that it teaches us this bald truth; that God is indignant at every refusal of his offered grace; and that no excuses diminish in his eye the naked offensiveness of the insult. Let us now select a few specimens.

"I cannot give myself up to the invitations of the Gospel, because the whole subject appears to me unintelligible." Now can you on sober reflection conceive of any thing more insulting than this? Your Maker has made a costly provision for your welfare, and invites you to partake of it. Your simple reply is: "I cannot understand the invitation. Either then God is not sincere; or, he is not able to make himself understood.

But it is false. God does not believe you. You

can understand that you are perishing through guilt and depravity ; that a full provision is made in both these respects ; that, if you relish the provision, and prefer the host and company, you may and will come ; that the act of coming is totally a heart-preference or choice. The feast is spiritual, spread before the spirit ; and the willing heart partakes of it. All the difficulties you yourself make. They are not in the Gospel nor in its offers.

“I am unreconciled to several points in the Gospel, for I regard them as very unreasonable.” Here is another insult to the infinitely wise God. And it does not satisfy him. The penalty, you say, is excessive. But that is not the Gospel. If the penalty is not what the Gospel says it is, then the Gospel is false. If it is, and is eternal, so is the salvation offered you. Are you going to refuse eternal salvation, even if it is unreasonable that you should be punished for ever ; or rather, on the ground that you can show it is so ? The conditions are reasonable, surely ; for, more is gained than is sacrificed ; that only is required, which becomes every rational being to do. We pity poor souls sent to toil and to count their prayers ; to call on saints and angels for salvation ; who never do get peace or hope. We pity those who hang any part of their salvation on endless genealogies. But two simple conditions are made by the Master of the feast. Have an appetite for the feast, and a love of the company. Come and eat, and be in fellowship with Christ and his saints.

“I have not time.” That is both insulting and false. It means—something more important claims my time. Some duty more imperative binds my conscience. It puts God upon waiting your convenience.



It says : " Wait until I abuse thy mercy longer ; then come to me with it again. I hope to become a Christian." When ? When your Maker is ready ? " No ; when I am ready ! " It is false ; because it does not require as much time as you give to infinitely inferior things. It is false, because you have got the present hour in which you may come to the feast.

" I have not feeling enough." That does not exclude you from the invitation, nor prevent your coming. The will can act ; and in every case of self-conquest, must act against the feelings, or without them.

" The invitation is not personal ; it does not mean me." There is not a limitation or qualification to be found in the apostolical commission ; not one in Christ's offers ; in the apostles' offers ; in our commissions ; in your Bible. See this parable. Who more unlikely to be welcome than the poor, the maimed, the halt and blind ? The invitation is as broad as the law, as its requirements, as its curse. Insert your name in the card, and then let it sound forth in hearing of the universe. No matter what your character or condition ; say what you will of yourself, it does not exclude you from the invitation ; nor will any thing but unwillingness shut you out from the feast. If you think sin a trifling evil, avow it, and offer that as your reason. If you have no desire to possess the forgiveness and favor of God, then that is the real reason. The real state of the case is this : you think, in the depth of your heart, that you will have a comfortable berth in the next world, by one means or another, however you treat this invitation. And on that falsehood believed is founded your indifference.

*Then each act of refusal is a sentence of self-con-*

*demnation.* It is a personal act. God does not do it. The preacher does not do it for you. Your neighbor cannot refuse for you. Parents cannot refuse for their children. It is one of the most distinctly individual and personal of your actions.

It is voluntary. No kind of outward constraint can cause it, or prevent it, unless you choose. If you were under Mohammedan control, that should prohibit your confessing Christ, it could not prevent you from accepting the invitation to his feast; for the acceptance is purely spiritual and voluntary. So is the refusal.

It is intelligently done. You can plead no want of clearness in this feature of the Gospel.

It rejects salvation, and presents reasons as satisfactory and sufficient for such rejection. But sufficient or insufficient, you shut the door of heaven with your own hand. You dash the cup of salvation to the earth; you tear the proclamation of your pardon in pieces.

It is a deliberate and contemptuous rejection of God's love as expressed in the Gospel.

*We see the value of a present moment under the invitations of the Gospel.* It is a moment when God waits to be gracious. The feast is ready; the Master waits. Can any part of the universe present such a spectacle; God inviting; some accepting; some refusing!

The decision is final at some such moment as this. "The doors were shut." "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." This refusal establishes an eternal relation between God and the soul; and what a relation!

See that soul turning away from God's banquet-house, satisfied with the wisdom of its preference!



## LECTURE XIX.

THE SEED IN GOOD GROUND; OR, RIGHT RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL.

MATT. XIII. 23. “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

IN all the former stages of this parable we have seen the expectations of the Sower disappointed. Now we come to see them gratified and realized. The seed is not here rejected by a rude, ungenial soil, that has no affinities for its precious life; nor is it received by a partial sympathy that gives it a temporary entertainment; nor has it a rival growth of thorns, that finally choke and destroy it.

Here is a reception of Christ's Gospel into a heart which bids it a full welcome, and incorporates it into its very life; so that now the direct glorious results at which infinite mercy aimed in creating the facts of the Gospel, and sending to men the message and offers of salvation, are realized.

Our attention is here called to the right reception of the Gospel, and to the consequences of it.

I. WHAT IS THE RIGHT RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL?

The answer may be given in a word. It is the re-

ception of it into the mind and heart, as the remedy for sin. This involves

*The recognition of sin.* He receives the word by understanding it. In Luke it is said: "That on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it." "Good and honest hearts" cannot here mean hearts without sin; for, in that case, there would be no Gospel for them. Christ says: "I came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." An honest heart is one that acknowledges its wrong. There is no honesty in any of us denying that we are sinful before God, and sinners against him. "Take heed how ye hear," says the Saviour. If any spend his life in trying to deceive himself and his Creator, and to pass for something better than a sinner, then he hears the word, in a frame of mind and heart which makes it "foolishness," or a stumbling-book" to him.

There have been thousands to whom the Gospel was first proclaimed in their adult age; and among them we see striking instances of this honest and good heart. Their goodness did not consist in not needing a Saviour, but in knowing that they were not what they ought to be, and in longing to be good. Such were the first Jewish converts,—Andrew, Peter, John and Nathanael. Such was the woman of Sychar. Such too was Lydia, a Gentile woman. Such was the treasurer of the Ethiopian queen. Some of these persons had probably been meditating for years upon their sinful, guilty and helpless condition; following such light as they had, and longing for more. And the moment a Saviour was announced, who had come from heaven to make the wicked holy, their hearts rushed to meet him.



In the life of every person who is born under the Gospel, an opportunity is furnished of accepting or rejecting it. In some cases it continues only through a brief period of childhood. With others, it continues on through youth. And if they do not believe in Christ before they reach their tenth year, they never again in all eternity will be within the reach of that salvation. Thus their ranks are diminishing every year; fewer and still fewer remain to hear the call of mercy. And when a man has attained to sixty years of age, even in the most fixed population, he looks around the sanctuary in vain to find those that heard the Gospel there with him in childhood. With the majority probation is very brief; with none is it very long. But while it lasts, the good Sower continues to sow. And in some cases his patience is wonderful; that he should continue thirty, forty, sixty years sowing, sowing on such a heart, hearer, as yours, that never received the seed, nor brought forth a single fruit!

But where it is received effectually, there, I have said, is a consciousness of sin. Especially is there a sense of the intrinsic and enormous evil of sin, and of their own dreadful condition as sinners. That draws the dividing line in our religious assemblies. With some, sin is a vague, undefined sort of evil; which, like other disagreeable things, must be kept out of sight. They have never been willing to know how tremendous an evil it is for man to be ungodly, disobedient, and unholy. And hence the Gospel is but an amusement. The other class find in the requirements of God's law a perfect and an infinite excellence. They find the same in the Saviour's character. But sin is

the opposite of all that. It is just as hideous and fearful as they are lovely and desirable. To be a sinner is to be an enemy of God,—is to have perverted all his gifts, to have rebelled against his authority, to have hated his happiness, to have set ourselves against the well-being of his kingdom. It is selfishness, pride, disobedience, ingratitude, rebellion, in all ; in some it has put on grosser forms, such as become insufferable even to a community of sinners.

Now until any person sees, to some degree, this to be the nature and character of sin, he is not prepared to appreciate the Gospel, nor to hear it aright.

Nor is this sufficient ; as the Gospel is an offer of salvation to individuals, it must be heard by us as those who have in it every sacred and immortal interest at stake. We are under the sentence of eternal death as the transgressors of God's law ; and we come to hear a proclamation of forgiveness from our Judge. It is to us as if the day of judgment had come ; we have heard the clangor of that awful trumpet, have seen the gathering nations assembled to hear their doom. The Judge is on his great white throne ; the books are opened ; and we are there expecting to hear our names announced, our actions and our characters described, and our souls and bodies given up to the power of sin and the horrors of the second death. But hark ! a sweet trumpet sound announcing a suspension of proceedings. An angel comes forth and opens a broad scroll, and reads thus :—

“ From the King eternal, the Most High God ; to the guilty children of Adam : Hear ye. In our infinite clemency judgment is suspended ; and for the space of one hour full opportunity is given to every one to



approach the Judge, and ask for pardon and eternal life."

What an hour is that! What an opportunity! So comes a soul to hear the Gospel, that knows its own guilt, and longs for forgiveness. There is no self-excusing; for every excuse is an argument against our having any thing to do with the Gospel. It offers pardon to the guilty; it offers heaven to the undeserving; it offers holiness to the vilest, if they but know and abhor their vileness, and long for holiness. "Ho, every one that thirsteth; come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price."

The right reception of the Gospel, then, further includes

*The acceptance of the remedy it offers.* Here I would call your attention to two other parables in the same chapter with this of the sower. The one compares the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hid in a field; the other, to a merchant seeking goodly pearls. In despotic governments property is very insecure. This has led to the practice of burying precious metals, coin and jewels. A man ploughing a field, lights upon such a prize, and goes to purchase the field where it has been concealed. An old law definition of *treasure trove* is—property concealed, for which now at its discovery, no owner can be found. Here are the persons in whom the Gospel itself, heard by accident, as in the case of the woman of Sychar, or from custom or curiosity, or a general conviction of duty, arouses a sense of their want, which it alone can satisfy. But the pearl-merchant is on the search for pearls. This describes another class found among the Jews and Pagans. They are weary of all that the earth contains, because

it is not made to satisfy the soul. Some have made, like King Solomon, the chase of happiness, through the whole range of created good ; and like him they have rendered the verdict : “ vanity of vanities.” Saul of Tarsus had sought it in formalism and a high morality. Augustine had sought it in pleasure and philosophy. Justin Martyr had sought it in the whole round of Greek philosophy. And alike joyfully did they “ sell all,” to buy the priceless pearl. Self-righteousness, self-will, and self-love were the idols to be renounced, that the God-man might rule in their hearts. The first true reception then that any one gives the Gospel, is, when they accept Christ to be their Saviour ; take the offered salvation as a free gift ; and return to God as their reconciled Father ; henceforth to obey and serve him. It includes the rejection of all other good as the portion of the soul ; the abandonment of every dependence but on Christ alone for salvation. This is the first reception. Thenceforth, the word is heard continually, for instruction, for consolation, for guidance, and for sanctification. So that another element of a right reception of the Gospel is this : accepting and employing it,

*For growth in holiness ;* or, as Peter calls it, growing in grace. And the phrase is very significant. There are those who truly accept the offers of mercy in the Gospel, and take salvation and a Saviour “ without money and without price.” They begin well ; but after a time they slide back into the old tracks of self-righteousness ; not perceiving that it is the Gospel, and not the law, which can sanctify. The regenerated soul then hears the word ; to grow in the sense of his need of Christ ; to grow in his estimate and desire of holiness ; to discover the heights and depths of grace ; to



learn the methods of God's grace with the soul ; to see its own glorious inheritance in Christ ; to learn to pray ; to anticipate heaven's employments and enjoyments. In such the seed produces fruit.

## II. WHAT THEN ARE THE RESULTS ?

*The whole character is changed.* "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away ; behold all things are become new." What was bad, is now renounced in action, in emotion, in thought. What was good, is purified from its selfishness and ungodliness. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." To see these fruits exemplified, let us look at Saul of Tarsus. He tells us that he was "alive" once, in his ignorance of the law. He did not know what lust, or wrong desire was, until the law said to him : "Thou shalt not covet." Then he found his morality to be altogether a whitened sepulchre. From sins in man's eye he had scrupulously, honorably abstained. But, from sins in God's eye he had not had any care to abstain. Now he saw himself both condemned and depraved. He fled to the Saviour. He received the Gospel into a good and honest heart. And what were the effects on his character ? He became humble. He ceased ascribing any thing to himself ; that he might ascribe all to God. He ceased thinking highly of his outward advantages. He ceased aspiring to be thought great. He ceased avenging himself ; or being sensitive to reproach, neglect, or contempt. He ceased seeking high earthly alliances, stations, or honors. He became gentle, condescending, and entirely simple in his character. He became spiritual ; turned

away from luxury, ease and wealth. He turned to the kingdom of God, as his present delight; to heaven as his home; to the Holy Ghost for comfort; to the judgment for his rewards; to the godly for his social enjoyments; to prayer in his trials; to praises for entertainment; to the Scriptures for instruction. His love entered a new channel. Self was no more its supreme object; personal friends and his own nation no more its boundary. He loved Christ intensely. He loved Christ's disciples more than any other men. He loved mankind with a love that would cheerfully have embraced the cross for them. His heart expanded to the vastness of an asylum for the whole afflicted family of man. Every church was dear to him; and every member of every church. "Who is weak, and I am not weak; who is offended, and I burn not!" "The care of all the churches is come upon me."

Here were fruits more rich in God's sight than all the productions of nature in her most luxuriant gardens, than all the products of philosophy, of science, or of any other form of human cultivation. Another and consequent result of this change is,

*A change in the whole life.* If a brackish fountain has suddenly lost its bad qualities, the change will be discovered in the sweetness of the stream that flows from it.

We may here turn again to Paul. He is living supremely for the glory and kingdom of God. He used to live for himself and the little coterie of Pharisees like himself. But now he has given up all that. The seed of the kingdom has fallen upon the soil, taken root, and begun to grow. And now the renewed man can say: "For me to live is Christ." He used to glory in



Judaism, in Pharisaism, in Saul the pupil of Gamaliel, the straitest of the strait. Now he exclaims : “ God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ.” He goes through the world more like an angel than a man, burning with seraphic love to the glorious Redeemer, and holding up his cross to the adoration of the universe.

There was another change in his outward life. He gave all his energies to the conversion of other men to God. Probably a more laborious, self-denying man has never lived. But it was all for the benefit of others. He had received the promise of heaven. That was secured to him. He was not laboring to earn it, or to make it sure ; but to induce his fellow men to share its blessedness with him.

Now it is true that very few are called to the same outward course which was assigned to him. But with all, the same motives ought to be equally predominant ; although their sphere and the mode of action may be the routine of some secular employment, and the obscurity of homely domestic duties.

There is in nature and in grace a variety in the kind as well as quantity of fruit that the husbandman desires. But when the Word of Christ is received as it should be, then there is fruit in the heart, and fruit in the life ; “ Some thirty, some sixty ; and some, a hundredfold.”

*There is, then, a great responsibility in preaching, hearing, and possessing the Word of God. Our responsibility is to God. He is sowing on the field of our hearts. That a field has soils of various kinds, may be a matter of no interest to any one else ; but to the fru-*

gal farmer it is a matter of great interest. To the passing traveller it would occasion no anxiety to know whether all was hard as the wayside ; or all a light soil on a broad undivided rock ; whether thorns and thistles had intertwined their noxious roots over all its surface ; or whether it would give bread to the sower, and return thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold to the reaper. But to the industrious laborer this was a matter of the first moment. That laborer represents the Lord. No man knows the depth of his solicitude as to the results of preaching and hearing the Gospel. What delight it gives him to hear his ambassadors proclaim the Gospel in its simplicity and fulness ; and to see men receiving it in faith and submission, none can tell. Perhaps there is nothing in the universe so delightful to him. “I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.”

What a beautiful spectacle is a rich, mellow soil, lying under the mild showers of spring, and the invigorating warmth of a summer's sun, with the refreshing of its dews and rains animating the grain, pushing forth the tender blade ; then the green ear, then the full corn in the ear ! But how much more beautiful to see a heart open to receive the communications of God's light and love, that it may take the impression of his image ; that it may render back a hundredfold in love and homage, in gratitude and obedience, in praise and thanksgiving ! And what an evil must it be to disappoint Christ of all that ! What an evil in the preacher ! What an evil in the hearer ! Then,

*We may do well to review our past hearing.* Did we harden our hearts by outward sins ; bad books ; bad companions ; excessive worldly care, pursuits and



occupations? Have we encouraged scepticism? Have we resisted the convictions of guilt and depravity? Have we tried to cheat Christ by formality, good resolutions, or any other substitute for faith, repentance, and obedience? Then let us see the wickedness of this course; and abandon it, without delay.

To which class do you belong? Is your heart the wayside, the rocky soil, or the thorny ground; or is it the good ground? How are you meeting the Gospel now? What was your motive in coming to the house of God? Was it to learn his will, to obey his commands, to be sanctified wholly? Did you come with meditation and prayer? Christ aims at profound changes. Do you? Are you "seeking pearls?" Have you heard for yourself, with the fear of being deceived; with earnest attention? Have you heard with a heart dead to the world; afraid of cowardice,—of compromising; ready to see itself; to be humbled; to make sacrifices to change its purposes; mainly anxious to be reconciled to God, to be like Christ, and to glorify him?

*We should look out from this service to its consequences.* Christ is looking to future and eternal consequences. Hence he compares men hearing his Word to builders. He that hears and obeys, builds upon a rock. He that hears without obedience, builds on the sand. And the storm is coming, the floods will swell; and sea and wind will beat upon his house; and it must fall terribly, says the Lord. It is therefore a matter of supreme moment to you to hear aright. Here, under this discourse, this parable is now illustrated to the eye that searches our hearts.

One is hearing as if he had not a soul, or that soul had no interest in this glorious Gospel. He has amused himself with the sermon, or something else. And what is to become of God's sowing on his heart to-day? Nothing; nothing for God; nothing for its own future welfare; nothing for the world's good.

Another is hearing with much interest, and with self-application. But what is going to come of it hereafter? It is going to wither and perish. Why must that be? Because he is looking only on the bright side of religion, and not giving himself to Christ, with a cordiality which will be proof against opposition, ridicule and persecution. There are members of his own family, or a company into which he will hereafter fall, that shall shake him loose from Christ and his service.

Another is hearing too with interest, who will also decline from Christ, because the world is going to present itself, by and by, in such charms as to steal away the heart from the Saviour.

These painful anticipations our Lord had when he uttered this parable. And they are full of warning to us.

We must then hear, with earnestness, with faith in God's testimony, and a cordial returning to Christ.



## LECTURE XX.

### THE LOST SON RESTORED ; OR, THE SINNER'S RETURN.

LUKE XV. 11-32.—“ And he said, A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to *me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him : and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet : and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it* ; and let us eat, and be merry : for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in : therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he

answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

IN the range of human eloquence, there can be found no exhibition of stern, but courteous rebuke, at once so simple and so effective as this story.

The Scribes and Pharisees had reproached Jesus, because he received sinners, and ate with them. In order to silence their murmurings, and those of their class in every age, our Lord related first the case of the shepherd and the woman searching for their lost treasures; adding in each case, a declaration that opens heaven to our view, and shows the whole celestial regions filled with joy at the repentance of even the vilest sinner. And then, when we have seen, first, the humble shepherd's heart swelling with joy at the recovery of his poor, wandering sheep; the humble cottager calling in her neighbors to share her delight at the restoration of the lost money; while we behold the angels rejoicing at the scene of those degraded sinners gathering to hear the preaching of Jesus, and to repent at his word; when we are looking upon the infinite God, with paternal tenderness welcoming back these degraded children of Abraham; and all "the household of faith" exulting, then the Pharisee is brought before us, proud, cold, sullen and self-righteous; murmuring at his father's kindness; forgetting that this is a brother restored to virtue, home and blessedness. His voice is heard amid the anthems of angels, and of the church in hea-



ven and earth ; but only in jarring discord ; marring the celestial harmony by the grating notes of fiendish pride and jealousy.

Having already considered the vindication of God's mercy, which is the main object of this parable, we may now fix our attention upon that part which so graphically exhibits the soul's departure from God, and its return.

The parable describes three stages of experience : the soul abandoning God ; its return to God ; its reception by God.

### I. THE DEPARTURE.

Here we see most graphically and perfectly exhibited the course of every child of Adam ; though it goes beyond the experience of some ; as it was designed to meet the very extremest case of apostate, and even abandoned humanity. We have here brought to view,

1. *The essence and germ of all sin, as it consists in an indulged feeling.* If that point could be clearly seen, the whole world would be convicted of sin. It began in Eve, when she first entertained a suspicion of God. That seems to be the tap-root of sin ; as faith is the deepest root of goodness. It manifests itself, however, in indirect forms of feeling, which can more easily be recognized than its direct exercises.

This young man was first alienated in heart from his father. Then came these various shades of feeling ; independence of his father's love ; independence of his care ; aversion to his authority ; regardlessness of his wishes. This is our sin, as it lies in the soul, before it assumes an outward form ;

Independence of God's love. When a child ceases

to prize his parent's love, the cord is severed. He may be thenceforth outwardly dutiful and respectful; but, there is no more vitality in their union, no more simplicity and satisfaction in their intercourse. The human heart demands love as its life. It must love, and be loved. This son needed to be the object of love; and he must therefore find it elsewhere, if possible. The fatal step was taken by each of us, however early, at that moment in which we made up our minds that we could be happy without God's love. All is wrong when we are indifferent to the society and the friendship of our heavenly Father. We have then already departed from home; although we may linger about the house, as this young man did, for a few days, or for fifty years.

Independence of God's care is another form of this feeling. "In him we live and move, and have our being." But we are averse to feeling that; and hence, prayer is irksome to us. Instead of saying, "give me the portion, that I may be independent," filial love says, "give me to-day what I need, for I am dependent." This young man knew that he needed money; but thought he did not need a father's love. The property he prized as indispensable; but, the father himself was worth nothing to him. And so, alas! we have regarded God.

Aversion to the pressure and restraint of God's authority is another form of this feeling. He wished to be his own master; for, perfect freedom he regarded as indispensable to his happiness. The house was governed too strictly for his comfort. It was too quiet and dull for his buoyant spirits. He must be a man; be off, and see the world, and live as he listed. Thus have



we felt about God's authority. His laws are too strict. He requires us to give up too much, and do too much.

Regardlessness of God's feelings is at the root of our wickedness. The son planned totally for his own gratification, and never probably for an instant thought of the base ingratitude of his course. No man ever chooses ingratitude for its own sake, either toward man or God. But every one is ungrateful to God by supremely prizing his own gratification, and disregarding that of his Maker. Your heart beats ; and on that pulsation depends your life. Did you ever pause to think that that beating is independent of your will ! You lie down and sleep in utter oblivion of yourself or your life ; but one guardian eye is watching over your pillow ; one kind hand is keeping that ebb and flow of the vital current. Oh ! when you awake in the morning, why do you not exultingly cry : " All my springs are in thee ; " why do you not feel that you are bound by the most sacred and tender ties to do his will !

The question with every wanderer from God, is : how may I please myself ; not, how may I please Him ?

To this mental departure from our Heavenly Father there then succeeds,

2. *An outward departure.* Now comes the shaping of selfish desires into a plan. It includes these points : The son must claim the property, as he could not live without that. That, in fact, was to make him happy ; and the end to be gained was, to get the property into his own hands, so that he might enjoy it without having any thing to do with his father. " Give me," was his cry ; " give me, that I may be independent, and exile myself from thee." So we must have God's property. And our plan includes the getting of that, and the for-

getting of Him. "Give me, give me," is still our selfish cry, from day to day. Having renounced God as the source of happiness, we must now find it in his gifts. And the only distinction that arranges sinners into various classes, is, the difference in the forms of created good each thinks best suited to make him happy without God. The next stage of progress, was, to gather all together. Do you see that infatuated young man? He is gathering all together, to go away from his father, his home, his country. That is man, gathering up every thing of God's he can lay his hands upon, to be happy without him.

He must then quit the house; although it was an endeared place; and, at any time, it would make him sad to leave it. Yet now, with desperate decision he resolves to break these tender cords. He is doing wrong. It is not duty, but infatuation that impels him. But he has concluded that he cannot be independent there: that he is too much restrained there, and therefore must go. Such is man's spiritual departure from his Father's presence. He forsakes the Bible; which is an abandonment of both the law and the Gospel. He turns away from prayer and the society of the godly.

"Not many days after;" there was a little interval while the purpose rested in his heart, yet unexecuted. Soon, however, it put on an outward form. And God lets man make the trial of finding happiness apart from him; but, only once in an eternity does he permit any individual to make it. We still follow the current of the story, to see,

3. *The misery into which it plunges him.* Sufferings are of two kinds. The one pertains to man as a



spirit made for alliance with God ; with vast desires and capacities. This highest, noblest part of man's nature suffers when it is cut off from God, and prevented from exercising love, confidence, obedience, and communion toward God. It is the life that is fed, "not by bread, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The sensibility of the soul to this form of suffering may be deadened ; and yet it is a miserable state. Many a child thinks he is happy when he has ceased to love his parents. Ask him, and he will tell you, he is not conscious of suffering. But you call it a wretched state. A maniac may insist that he is in a palace ; and that his dungeon is a splendid reception-hall ; while you know he is in a pitiable state. A Hindoo holds up his arm until it loses its sensibility and its power of motion. Is he happy because he is not conscious of his dreadful state ? This form of suffering is consistent with abounding in various kinds of contentment. The other form consists in losing the lower sources of enjoyment ; property, health, and friends ; which throws the soul back on the consciousness of its poverty. Some have reached the sense of spiritual want, even while enjoying all earthly good. They begin to discover that they have forsaken God the fountain of living waters, and hewn out to themselves "broken cisterns that can hold no water." They have gone "away into a far country." Ah, that far country ! There is no God there ; no prayer, nor praise ; no Saviour, no sanctification, no hope, no joy in the Holy Ghost. Devils love to dwell there. And are you passing your youth there ; and shall death come and find you there ? Poor Byron exclaims :

“My days are in the sere and yellow leaf;  
The fruit and flower of love are gone.  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are left to me alone.”

Some do not begin to know their spiritual poverty, until they lose their earthly good. When the wanderer had wasted all his property, then there began to be a mighty famine in that land. “Then shall your want come upon you as an armed man.” The soul is now brought to feel that it cannot live without God’s forgiveness, his love, communion with him, sanctification, and hope in Christ.

But the sad story of the departure is not yet closed. We have yet another stage to contemplate ;

4. *The false steps he takes to extricate himself.* He ought to have retraced his steps, and to have returned directly home. Men disappointed in the world, men weary of themselves, and conscious of guilt and depravity, men dreading the wrath of God, ought immediately to return to him by Christ. But we find that the first stage of conviction does not, ordinarily, change the original purpose of living without God. Hence there is a temporary shifting, to avoid the painful sense of want ; a trying to help one’s self. Pride is yet unsubdued. Self-confidence yet leads the soul to look out for itself. This is strongly described by the old prophets. Amos says from God (iv. 6, 7, 8): “And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places : yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And also I have withholden the rain from you ; and yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.”

But perhaps some will say, “the parable fails to



meet my case, because I have never gone into dissipation and riotous living." They, however, misapprehend its intention. It was designed, subordinately, to show, not only that no distance in this life from God, is too great; but also, that the natural tendency of all departures from God is the same; and thus, with fearful exactness, it meets every case.

The first discovery of our want usually drives us farther away from God. He "went, and joined himself to a citizen of that country." This is plunging still deeper into misery, guilt and shame. He joined himself to a citizen of that country; one at home there, living in that far-off land. Thus some, under the conviction of sin, fly to scepticism or to scoffing. Does that, wanderer, bring you home; does that give you peace? Who is that citizen you substitute for God? Do you know who is his King? Others take up with efforts at reformation in various ways. That would be well if they would not rest there. The purpose to reform is indispensable. But it does not bring you home. Business, political enterprises, amusements, dissipation and travel, often are resorted to as a substitute for conversion. This citizen, however, "sent him into his field to feed swine." Now he becomes a servant, and a feeder of swine. He would fain have relieved his gnawing hunger with *husks*. But husks are not good for man. And yet all he feeds upon, out of Christ, is husks. What a change for this young man! He has forsaken his father, refused to be a son, and so must become a slave. Whosoever will not serve God, must serve the devil. He would not live in the palace, and must then go among the brutes. He refuses to dwell among princes, and must live with dumb beasts. He refuses

to feed on angels' bread, and must eat the swines' husks. The beast is predominant, the angel is lost. Oh what a state! He feeds, but hungers; he wants, but no man gives.

This is the dark, and humbling side of the picture. We now contemplate,

II. THE RETURN; which presents itself to us in three successive stages: reflection, resolution, and action.

1. *Reflection.* "He came to himself," and turned the matter over. Reflection is indispensable to the action of truth on the mind. Sin is departing from God and self. It is delusion, or insanity. And the first step of recovery is reflection. He begins to think upon these moving themes—his father; the home of his childhood; his own foolish conduct. He compares his situation with that of the servants. The last change he sees to have been even worse than the first. Your reflections should embrace these points,—what, and where you are. Compare yourself with angels and saints in heaven. Why are you not as holy and as happy as they? What are your prospects? How may you return home? The second step is:

2. *Resolution.* "I will arise, and go to my father." This was a wise, but painful decision. And hence here is another road where poor human nature turns aside from God and salvation. Some go "to a citizen of that country;" some stay with the swine contentedly; denying that they need any better portion. He, however, resolves to arise; depart; go in rags; confess, and not palliate his conduct; submit to degradation; and cast himself on his father's merey. Then follows,



3. *Action.* He goes. His pride is subdued. His self-conceit is destroyed; his soul, weary of wandering. His filial affections returned as he resolved to confess and forsake his sin. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned."

This was a heavy burden to carry on so sad and unpromising a journey. He knew not how he should be received; he must go, reflecting on the past; recalling the memories of childhood, as he retraced his steps through roads once familiar to him. Thus must we make our way back to our heavenly Father.

There remains then one more stage,

### III. THE RECEPTION.

If we had never heard this story before, there is probably not one of us who would not await with interest the opening of the next scene. But let us remember that this is not a romance, written to amuse us, accomplishing its end when curiosity is awakened and satisfied. It was designed to convey to the human race one of those facts which is to them of supreme importance. The whole interest of the story concentrates here. However frequently we may have contemplated it, and though unaided by novelty, let us earnestly return to it. Here we see,

1. *The unchanged affection of the father.* He saw the son yet a great way off. Now, what emotion is awakened in his heart, by the sight? Is justice, or mercy predominant? Is the sense of injury, righteous indignation, holy contempt now indulged; or, does parental love, pity, forgiveness rule in that heart? These are probably the inquiries now agitating that young man's weary spirit. And the answers to them make the dif-

ference between life and death. The universe has now to him no retreat but that dear domestic spot. If those doors are opened to him ; if a generous welcome awaits him there ; if his shattered bark can now moor in that peaceful haven, all is well. If not, his doom is sealed. And do you know that to-day that prodigal is seated there among you ? You are listening with mere curiosity, at a comment on this story. He is a prisoner on trial for his life ; watching the foreman of the jury as he rises to return the verdict : guilty, or not guilty. A word, a look now turns the scale of destiny with him. Oh what a word then is this ! “ But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion ; ” (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ; his vitals moved ; his heart beat quick ; this is the sense of the term.)

Yes, sinner, that is it ; he saw him afar off, and had compassion. That is the greatest fact to you just now, in the universe. There is justice, high, inflexible, dreadful, in God. But he has satisfied its holy demands ; and now to every returning spirit his compassion can flow out, unobstructed. You are yet a great way off. Your ignorance of God, of yourself, of your own sinfulness, yet separates you. Penitence is feeble, resolution is weak, and yet you have returned ; you have forsaken the far country, and trodden back your weary steps. You have left companions, husks and swine, with that cruel citizen who mocked your misery. You have come within sight of your father’s mansion, and he is moved with compassion. Let us now observe,

2. *The expressions of it.* “ He ran.” Running befits young men. The movement does not become the dignity and gravity of age ; and yet the most venerable father may run to greet the long-lost child. He



will, if he have cordially, fully forgiven the prodigal, in his heart. This father had. And that means to say, God has. Yet it should be said, there is not always the same expression of it. Joseph was a type of Christ. He found it necessary to continue the severer process long after he had forgiven his brothers. But his love was such that he could scarcely restrain his gushing tears, amid the stern reserve he maintained. "He embraced the son." The kiss, among the orientals, was the token and pledge of reconciliation. When Absalom had returned from his exile he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face, to the ground; and the king kissed Absalom. "God is in Christ reconciled." He ordered the best robe to be substituted for his tattered garments. Some say, as it is in the Greek, "the first robe;" that it means, "reinstate him in his original position and rights." But he took all that he could claim, when he abandoned his father. And now he had nothing but the badges of his poverty, and could not claim the poorest garment in the house. Every thing had been wasted, that his spendthrift hands could seize. There was but one treasure left him in the universe. And to teach him the worth of it was the end of all this discipline. That treasure was his father's unchanging love.

When Pharaoh set Joseph over all his kingdom, and made him lord in the palace, he took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain upon his neck. These were the external tokens of that honor to which he wished to raise him. And so God welcomes, adopts, clothes and adorns every truly repenting and returning sinner. He has now received

garments fit for the king's son ; he has brilliant ornaments. His feet are shod with the preparations of the Gospel of peace, and he is prepared to run in the way of his father's commandments ; where he shall run without weariness, and walk without fainting. The father's joy flows over, on every side. He orders a feast. Joy is social, communicative ; it gains by giving ; it increases by scattering. The fatted calf, kept for the greatest occasions, must be killed and cooked. The gloom and dulness of the old mansion must give way ; music and dancing (not performed by the guests, but by hired persons) must entertain the young. Why, what means all this ! Has a prince of the blood royal deigned to come there ? Yes, exclaims the father, it is more than a prince ; it is a dead son come forth from the grave. Look at him ; see his mother's smile ; look at him, he is bone of my bone ; he is part of my soul. I have wept through weary nights for him. Long and painfully have I prayed for him. It is my son. Go to king David, if you would understand my feelings. Hear him as he walks and weeps in the chamber above the gate of the city of his exile ; " O my son Absalom ; my son, my son Absalom : would God I had died for thee ; O Absalom, my son, my son ! "

Hearer, I pause ; human feelings are weak ; parental love partakes of our common infirmities. But Jesus says joy penetrates heaven at the return of a sinner. He says it goes to the throne. See now,

3. *The effects of this reception.* There are two things noticeable. He is full in his confession. And when he is forgiven, it but makes his repentance and confession the more full, earnest and tender.

And see how true humility manifests itself. He had



resolved to offer himself as a hired servant, unworthy to be recognized as a son. But now when he sees that the father will place him again among the sons, he consents to go there. True humility goes as high as God will place it. False humility and pride alike miss that delicate line. When Louis XIV. would put the politeness of Chesterfield to the test, he stood at his carriage-door and made a signal for the nobleman to enter before him; who instantly obeyed. That, said the king, is a more refined politeness than most men would have manifested. He would not refuse an honor tendered by a sovereign.

Wanderer, is your exile painful to you? That is unspeakably better than contentment. If you make enough money, and live enough according to your tastes to make you contented, you may die in exile. Wanderer, do you know that you are feeding on husks? If you think them the proper nourishment of an immortal nature; if you call this far-off country your home, your rest, then the prospects of a return are dark and discouraging.

Has affliction followed affliction? Then a merciful hand is dealing with you? There is a hand guiding all the complex machinery of human life. And he who disturbs your quiet here, would have you know that this is not your rest.

Is one wanderer here wishing to return? Let nothing prevent the formation of that purpose; "I will arise, and go to my Father." If you have made the resolution, let nothing prevent its immediate execution. Pride may make you hesitate,—your clothes—your old companions—the elder brother may be the obstacle. Fear may prevent. But read that twentieth verse

again. See that young man trembling, ragged, wretched, as he enters the outer gate. What struggling doubts and fears distract him! “How will my father receive me; will he spurn me from his presence, as he justly may? But lo, the father sees him “a great way off—has compassion—runs—falls on his neck—kisses—forgives—welcomes—clothes—adorns—adopts him anew!” Come, brother, come home.





## PART III.

### THE CHURCH PRODUCED BY THE GOSPEL.

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#### § 1. ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY.

*Lect.* XXI. The light of the world—The Church a blessing.

#### § 2. ITS IMPERFECTIONS.

*Lect.* XXII. The Tares and Wheat—Visible Church imperfect.

#### § 3. TRANSFER.

*Lect.* XXIII. The Vineyard—Visible Church transferred to the  
Gentiles.

#### § 4. ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY.

*Lect.* XXIV. The Mustard-seed—The Church will fill the earth.





## LECTURE XXI.

### THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD ; OR, THE CHURCH A BLESSING TO THE WORLD.

MATT. v. 14. “ Ye are the light of the world.”

THE supreme object of the infinite, invisible, and ever-blessed God, seems to be the manifestation of his glory to his intelligent creatures. And as material light reveals material things to man, so, whatever manifests God, is called light. If we take this clue to the labyrinth of creation, Providence and revelation, it guides us through them all, relieves us from many perplexing doubts, and suggests expanded conceptions of the unity, grandeur and kindness developed by the stupendous plan. To know God in his works is true science : to know him in his providence is still more important. But to know him in Christ is indispensable. And yet the world in its wisdom knows him not. There is much wisdom among men ; but it beholds not his beauty and majesty, his justice, goodness, wisdom, holiness and truth laying the foundations of the earth, and establishing the heavens. Providence still walks among us, but his wonderful footsteps are not seen ; his hand is not recognized. His word still



shines ; luminous with his unveiled attributes, with the history of his providence, the statutes of his empire, the counsels and purposes of his will, the mediation of his Son, the threatenings of his wrath, the invitations and promises of his mercy ;—and yet these have not satisfied his goodness. There must be one other channel of light. And so he says to the collective Church and to its individual members,—“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” The doctrine of this passage is, that,

*Christ's disciples are bound to make God manifest to the world.* Their obligation arises from the fact that God desires it ; and that this is an end at which he has supremely aimed in every thing he has done on their behalf. That this is his desire and intention appears,

I. FROM HIS DECLARATIONS CONCERNING THE CHURCH AND ITS MEMBERS, AND FROM HIS EMPLOYMENT OF THEM.

Nothing can show this more strongly than the position of the Church in the family of Noah during the deluge. What an exhibition to subsequent generations of the power, goodness, and fidelity of God ! So it was with Abraham and the Church in his house. He was a sun rising on those benighted nations ; revealing to them the one living and true God, in his holiness, condescension, goodness, and power. Joseph was the light of Egypt ; representing Jehovah in the midst of a nation of gross idolaters. Israel marching out of Egypt,

and entering the land of promise, was a light in the desert. Through that people God showed forth his purpose of establishing a kingdom in this world, and of maintaining it against the power and craft of Satan. And even in their captivity they were still God's witnesses. Mordecai, Daniel and his companions, Ezra and Nehemiah were lights shining brightly amid Babylon's darkness. Indeed Daniel was made to catch the light of God's purposes, hidden yet from other men, and reflect it on the proud spirit of earth's greatest despot; and reveal to him, not only what God is, but what he intended to do. See what light shone from the conduct of these children of God when a benighted pagan monarch saw their bold fidelity and dignified reliance on God, and his faithfulness in rescuing them! But we may now pursue this interesting view of the Old Testament Church no farther. "Glorious things were spoken of Zion, the city of the Lord. God was in the midst of her." Her light beamed out, like the lamp of Noah's ark; the only gleaming over a vast, dark, and desolate waste of waters. And yet the light which she was able to reflect was comparatively dim. When the Sun of Righteousness had once arisen, then the planets that he had set in the spiritual firmament were able to shed a brighter light upon a benighted world. And if saints under the Old Testament were bound to shine brightly, we ought to be as much brighter than Moses, and Abraham, Daniel and Isaiah, as our situation is more favorable than theirs. And it would be a most interesting journey to travel back to the days of the apostles, and see where the New Testament Church received the light, and began to diffuse it; and how through long



and dreary ages of declension and corruption there were still faithful depositaries of the truth, who preserved it and perpetuated it. The manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been preserved by faithful men in every age, until printing was invented. Since that day the Church has set herself to diffuse the pure word of God in the most faithful translations into the languages of the world. And the light of God's word is now shining on the cabinets of kings; on the statute-books of the nations; on their institutions, customs, philosophy, literature, social life, family relations, private life, and on the personal characters of men. The Church is thus the light of the world; the preserver of the Word of God, and the active instrument of its diffusion. Her sons are its preachers, and her daughters its teachers. The Church has given to the world, from the Bible, all its just notions of morality. To the Bible and the faithful exposition of it are we indebted for all just and rational notions of civil freedom; for all our hatred of slavery, war, intemperance and cruelty. Nothing can be more parricidal than for men who have received all their light and zeal from the Bible and its faithful exposition by the Church of God, to turn about and attempt to destroy that Church, because it does not see the wisdom nor the purity of their zeal. It remains a fact of history that the Church has enlightened the conscience of mankind; and exerted instrumentally, the only truly healing power to the diseased heart of the world. Since this has been the influence of the Church, we see that this is a part of our Lord's meaning, when he said—Ye are the light of the world. If we pass from the Church and its broad commission, to its individual members and their more limited sphere,

we see the same principle. The sinner in coming to Christ is seeking only his own salvation; but God in drawing him is aiming at a still greater object. No man lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel, but on a candlestick. The lamps of this house are arranged for the very purpose of giving light to all who would, without them, be here in darkness. The very fact of your conversion to God glorified him; to angels, principalities, powers in heaven, and to men. In conversion "we are a spectacle to men and angels." "Ye are my witnesses." It exhibits God's forbearance, holiness, power, mercy, and truth. Your conversion struck a blow that made hell tremble. Your friends and neighbors saw it. You went to work; but perhaps too much from impulse, and too little from principle. Too few, like Harlan Page, "shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day." Your commission however was, to go on catching more and more beams from your Redeemer's face, more of the light of the celestial city, and throw it back on a benighted world. "Neither do men light a candle to put it under a bushel." Surely not; nor does a God, infinitely wise. He made the sun, and filled it with light, and hung it up in the centre of this apartment of his house, to give light to all. His intention in the case is obvious; and if the sun were a voluntary and responsible creature, as each of us is, how terrible would be his guilt for refusing to shine! And every planet God has made; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser lights to rule the night. So has he set his Church; so has he set each member of it. Our responsibility then arises from his desires and intentions concerning us.



## II. HE HAS QUALIFIED US FOR IT.

1. *He has given us natural faculties adapted to exert an influence on other minds.* We have reasoning powers ; a capacity of improvement ; a vast control of the material world ; the pen ; the press ; the purse ; the power of speech ; and the affections of the soul to quicken and employ in the work of enlightening the world.

2. *He has renewed and sanctified and elevated us, and increased our moral power to do good.* Examine a lamp ; it is admirably fitted to give light and chase away darkness. So, if you observe a Christian, you will find his Maker's intention.

His perceptions and convictions are changed. He sees the truth, loves it, and knows it. He sees the verity of God's word, and its infinite superiority to every thing else. This is from God, and qualifies him to command it. His motives are changed. He has been converted to love God. "Hallowed be thy name" has now become his daily prayer. He sees how low it is to live for self. He no longer asks what is agreeable, or merely what is respectable or for his own interest ; but what is for God's glory and man's highest good ?

His character is changed. He is a new man ; "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." It is a striking phenomenon to see a person so changed, become so elevated, so heavenly, so much like Christ, that he is said to partake of the "divine nature ;" that is, supremely holy, and actually benevolent. He is a traveller disencumbering himself of every thing that could impede his heavenward journey. He is a penitent, tenderly mourning over his sins. He is heavenly, and not earthly. His treasures are in heaven ; and if

you find him a diligent tradesman, you will find him more diligent in laying up treasures in heaven than on earth. If you find him enjoying any amusements in common with others, you will find him much oftener and much happier in the assembly where his God is to be praised, and where he is to pray for his perishing fellow-men. Look at him, men of the world ; he is a converted man ! You may have morality, too ; but his is on a deeper, broader foundation than yours. He has morality, and piety too. See him ; he is illuminated by Jesus Christ “the Sun of Righteousness.” He has the image of Christ. Look at him ; he is on his way to heaven ; an earnest pilgrim, a serious warrior, contending against the very influences to which you yield yourselves. Look at him ; he communes every day, and often in the day, with God. Is he not a wonder ! Look at him ; for you will soon see the last of him. He is going to heaven ; you, to hell ! Surely God hath produced such a phenomenon in the world, in order to arrest its attention, and to show that there is a God ; that the Bible is true ; that Christ has died for sinners ; that he now reigns on high ; that he sends forth his renewing Spirit. Surely he has set these Christians as torch-bearers on the road to heaven ; each one of whom is saying : “Here, keep close to my footsteps, if you would reach the kingdom of God.”

But the intention of God is seen, not only in qualifying them, but in locating them.

III. HE HAS PLACED HIS PEOPLE IN THE MOST FAVORABLE POSITIONS FOR ENLIGHTENING THE WORLD.

Men arrange lamps in the best places for giving the greatest quantity of light.



1. *Now look at the Church of our day.* The truth-believing Church of God is stronger, and more numerous and wealthy in England and America than anywhere else. We know that a pure Christianity has caused this. But what is the ultimate intention of Providence in it? Is it not to use the English language, which is becoming, as the Greek was in our Saviour's day, the language of the race? has he not so favored us because our commerce, our adventurous spirit, our religious and civil freedom enable us to operate to the greatest advantage in diffusing light? Rome has, I admit, a better position and machinery than we, for propagating darkness. But the Church of God is now so situated that she can give the light to the whole race within twenty years, if she understands her responsibilities and privileges. See, too, how God has disposed of individuals. We are all conspicuous to somebody. "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." Some try to escape this responsibility. One was recently heard to exclaim: "I wish they would cut me off from the Church; then I could dance without any annoyance." But, what if they did? You do not mean to give up heaven, and all that God has done for you, for the sake of a few days of vain enjoyment! Your profession is not what should cause you shame; but your present state of feeling. You must not repent having joined the Church; but, having joined the world, after joining the Church.

The Christian is a conspicuous person, in his sphere. He pretends to great things. He expects great things. He separates himself from the world; meekly, quietly; but so thoroughly that the world do not expect to find him in certain places, and engaged in certain modes of conversation and action which they permit to

themselves. And even when they persuade a Christian into these places and courses, they despise him for complying.

He is still a member of a family ; for it is there his light shines ; whether as master or servant, parent or child. He “giveth light unto all that are in the house.” He is connected with others in business. Here his example, his principles, his conversation, are a bright light. He has a circle of acquaintances ; for God has so distributed his children in the world, that they can reach both Cæsar’s household and the peasant’s hut. He has given them the immense powers of example and of speech.

And it is all to the end that they may shine ; not for their glory, but his ; for, the injunction is ; “Let your light so shine before men, that they may glorify (not you, which is the tendency of ungodly morality, but) “your Father which is in heaven.”

*We can then account for the darkness which yet remains in the world.* The disciples of the primitive Church swept over continents in a lifetime ; changing, in three centuries, the face of the world. Why then is so wide a portion of the world still in darkness ? Paganism, Judaism, and Infidelity, have recovered much of their lost ground. Not only are doctrines lost sight of, and errors substituted for truth ; but also the knowledge of God as Holy and Just,—God as Redeemer,—has departed from men living under the light of the Gospel. It is not to be carelessly assigned to God’s sovereign arrangements. For, that would equally explain and exculpate all evil. When we have done all in our power to scatter the darkness of error and unbelief, then we may quietly leave the issues with a sovereign



God. Nor may we attribute it to the corruptions of the world; nor to any form of its depravity. It is a very unsatisfactory account to give of the failure of a medicine to heal, that the people were sick. The question is: Why are the sick not healed, when such a medicine is provided? Nor may we refer it to the indifference of the world. This indifference was disturbed in the apostolic times. And Christianity lacks nothing now, which it had then. It is conceded that miracles are not now needed. There is a light in truth and example, which is better adapted than miracles to affect our age. The Holy Spirit was the efficient agent then; and can be now. Christianity is now stronger in means; and it has fewer obstacles than then. But, our piety is less *attractive, impressive, and active* than theirs.

We think much of a little piety; so that our giants are dwarfs. We are superficial; confessing sin, without feeling its burden and hatefulness in detail; repenting, without brokenness of heart; renouncing the world, without forsaking it; devoting ourselves to God, without living any more to his glory. We are pushing off to another age the standard of piety which our judgments approve. We need a church composed of those who feel that they have been redeemed; redeemed by precious blood; who know that they are occupying the very earth that has been moistened by the tears and blood of their redeeming Lord. On such a soil what flowers of paradise might be expected to grow! We need a church to which we can point a world morally deranged, and say, "Look here at the Church! this is piety." We need a church, to which we can bring the heathen, and say: "See what kind of Christianity we are aiming to introduce among you!"

*Fellow-Christians ; let us arouse ourselves.* Let us search the Scriptures, not for doctrine alone, but to find how we can live more fully for the enlightening of a darkened world ; more according to the mind of God ; how we can accomplish the great ends of our redemption ; God's glory, our sanctification, and the conversion of men.

The first work is personal and internal. Be good, before you do good. See where we have lived, and what we have done. Every professor of religion is like a sun, under the sweet influence of whose example and godly conversation every plant of righteousness ought to flourish. But, alas ! the suns have gone into a voluntary and long eclipse ; and every thing in the world of their moral influence is dying, for want of light. Every professor professes to be a taper on the dark path of wandering souls. But, alas ! The tapers have been put under a bushel. Every member of the Church professes to be a light-house, on a dangerous coast. But, alas ! they have neglected to keep their lights steadily burning ; and dreadful wrecks are every where lining the coast !

Let us arouse ourselves to imitate primitive examples.

Noah honored God's testimony by building his ark in pleasant weather. He was alarmed, when sight and reason found no occasion for it. He was alarmed for himself, his family, the world. If you live a hundred and twenty years, let the world still hear you "hammering at your ark."

Abraham forsook the world ; he sacrificed Isaac ; being "strong in faith, giving glory to God."



Jacob, Elijah, the Syrophenician woman honored his faithfulness and mercy, as the hearer of prayer.

Moses chose God as his portion, and stamped "vanity" on the glory of Egypt.

David with his sling, illustrated the faithfulness of his God.

Daniel, and his companions, glorified him before the proud Pontiff of Bel, the autocrat of Babylon.

The earlier Christians had a simple and elevated piety, which impressed the world. Paul counted not his trials any thing, nor his life dear, so that he might turn men's attention to the grace of his Redeemer.

We have immense power for doing good. We can awaken men's consciences, by showing them in our lives the difference between a dutiful and an undutiful child; a friend, and an enemy of God. Our manner of living, our general conversation, our direct conversation, will show the reality of conversion. There is a loveliness in piety, a happiness and joy in faith and hope that the world will see when moving daily unobtrusively before their eyes.

The power of social influence for good or evil is immense. You are either advancing or obstructing the work of God in the world. Take simply this view of it. While you are listening to this sermon, many in this congregation are saying: "This is a high view of Christian character and influence; but, is it true?" And they begin to think of you and your daily deportment. As they remember you, their belief is either confirmed or enfeebled. They either think that some of you are insincere, or else that you exhibit all there is, of the loveliness, holiness, and power of the Gospel

of Christ ; and it seems then to them very much like the spirit of the world ; or, they say, this is a reality. God has converted some of our number that they may show us how much superior is piety to ungodliness ; faith, to unbelief ; benevolence, to selfishness.



## LECTURE XXII.

### THE TARES IN THE WHEAT FIELD ; OR, THE VISIBLE CHURCH, AND ITS IMPERFECTNESS.

MATT. XIII. 24-30. 36-43.—“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field : But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field ? from whence then hath it tares ? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up ? But he said, Nay ; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest : and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them : but gather the wheat into my barn. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house : and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man ; The field is the world ; the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one* ; The enemy that sowed them is the devil ; the harvest is the end of the world ; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire ; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

A HOLY Gospel must produce a holy Church, we should naturally infer; the kingdom of God brought on earth must at least keep its own territory separate from the domain of darkness. But history informs us that it is not so; and prophecy announced that this was not to be the case. This parable is a prophetic declaration that the Church of Christ on earth should be an imperfect body.

The visible Church, or the Church as a body organized on earth, has two kinds of imperfection; the personal defects of the regenerated, and the membership of unregenerated persons. These imperfections have, in every age, awakened a sincere zeal; and caused also an unenlightened, and even an impure zeal, to engage in the work of purification. The design of this parable is to enlighten and modify the former; and to strip the latter of its plausible argument.

The parable represents the world as a field in which wheat has been sowed. In the night, an enemy of the owner has come and sowed a degenerate and poisonous wheat over the other. This is a form of malice that none of us may ever have seen. But we find the old Roman law providing against it. And to this day, it is done in India, and even in Ireland.\* The form of this *Lolium Zizanium*, or Darnel, so closely resembles that of the wheat, as to make them difficult to separate, until the two have come to maturity. "Then appeared the tares also." The weeding process would, therefore, do more injury than good. In our Lord's explanation of this parable, he informs us that he is engaged in bringing in truly converted persons into his Church;

\* Trench on Parab. 78.



but that Satan is at the same time introducing unregenerated persons ; that Christ is sowing good seed in the hearts of his own people, and Satan is sowing bad seed ; for the seed here means both principles and persons. In a word, the great antagonistic works of corrupting and purifying the Church are carried on continually, the one by the Son of God, and the other, by Satan. The parable then brings to view the reformer's zeal springing from those feelings with which this imperfection of the Church is naturally regarded. "From whence then hath it tares?" is the inquiry. Evil is in the world ; but now we have left the world, and come to the Church. There, too, the Lord says, we must expect to find evil existing and active. And, he shows—that no human vigilance, zeal or diligence, to the end of time, will make the visible Church co-extensive with the invisible, and equally pure—that God forbids violent excommunications and persecutions ;—that the final excommunication will take place by the agency of holy angels ; and that none but the regenerated and perfectly sanctified will enter into the Church triumphant.

We look now at the fact :

I. NO ZEAL OR FIDELITY WILL SAVE THE CHURCH OF CHRIST FROM BEING AN IMPERFECT BODY ; TO THE END OF TIME.

That the visible Church is intended, although the expression is : "The field is the world," may be seen from the fact that the grain which grows up, grows up either wheat, or the false wheat. The figure, therefore, would not admit of completeness in the parallelism. The field where Christ sows truth, or good influences, is the world. But of that, he is not speaking here ; for,

he says, the good seed means good men. The field where his wheat grows, is the Church. And the corruption of that Church is the object supremely desired by its arch-enemy.

1. *What is then the imperfectness of Christ's visible Church?* I have already observed that it is twofold. Christ wills the sanctification of his people; Satan labors to make them as wicked as himself. Christ desires none to enter his Church, but such as have truly renounced the dominion of sin, and given themselves up to his control and care. Satan labors to bring those into the Church who still belong to him. Through the imperfections of the regenerated, and the insincerity of the unregenerated members of the Church, he does his malignant work, more or less effectually. And if we search for the cause of this, and for the process that brings it about, we may readily see,

2. *How the Church is thus kept imperfect.* False doctrine is one form of satanic influence. The Truth both converts and sanctifies; but Satan preaches another gospel. From the beginning Christ has contended against false prophets, false apostles, or Antichrist. And these are not opposed alone as bad men. They are opposed as teachers of falsehood. They corrupt the Church with error. Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul, and our Lord, are continually waging war on teachers of false doctrines. They knew nothing of the liberality that sees no importance in religious opinions. In fact, that is precisely a satanic doctrine itself; and seems to be the only one for which some have any zeal. It is impossible that a church can grow in holiness apart from the pure truths of the Gospel. Just so far then as



Satan succeeds in supplanting God's truth by men's speculations, he keeps the Church imperfect.

Another, but negative source of imperfection is the very nature of regeneration ; which is not a transformation to heavenly perfection, but the beginning of an eternal process ; crude in its first stages ; making the heart sincere, but leaving it encumbered with a vast mass of false notions, wrong desires, and evil habits. Does any convert at once love God as he will love Him in heaven ? Is that first glow of love in him a pure beam of light ; a gushing stream, unstained and unmixed as the waters of heaven ? No ; alas ! it is sincere, but it is soiled with many earthly elements ; sediments, that will settle to the bottom, ere it falls into that golden, crystal sea of perfect love. But he must come into the Church ; it is the very place for him ; it was made for him. Will he always honor the Church ? Will he, from this time, act so as to present only the new element of his character, in the family, in business, in the social intercourse of life ? Will none of the old nature and the old habits peep out any where from beneath the new garment ? If the world expects it, they will be disappointed. If they reason from it against the reality and the infinite importance of the change which has taken place, they will be equally at fault. Then there is a carelessness on the part of the Church, as a body, which gives prominence to the imperfections of its members. The style of preaching is probably nowhere perfect. Every Sabbath the people lose immeasurable benefits through our want of skill in presenting the truth. Then the example of one member of the Church affects another. One brings to view one phase of a worldly spirit, and another, some other form of it.

And there is carelessness in the admission of members to the Church ; many shrinking from too rigid exactions for admittance ; the world, blaming the Church for having so many unworthy members, and then blaming her for catechizing too strictly on admission.

But, no amount of care can make one man the infallible judge of another's heart. All that we can do in the case, is, to require certain evidences of regeneration ; and then leave the applicant to his own responsibility. If he entertains a slight estimate of the profession of Christ's name, the Church can do nothing else than admit him, provided he comply with certain terms. Satan will get false members into any branch of the true Church. He can sow tares where Christ sows wheat, in that field which is "the world," or, the Church in this world.

The other point presented by the parable, is,

II. THE EFFECT OF THE CHURCH'S IMPERFECTION ON THE FEELINGS OF GOOD MEN ; OR, THE DESIRE AND EFFORTS OF GOOD MEN TO PURIFY THE CHURCH.

The servants said to the Lord in reference to the tares : " Wilt thou that we go and gather them up ? " Inquire,

1. *How far this zeal is pure ?* To look with complacency or indifference on the evidence that Christians are imperfect, and that there is hypocrisy within the Church, is, to betray a heart at enmity with Christ, who supremely desires the sanctification of his people. Indignation ; grief ; and an earnest desire to remove scandals, to see the Church become perfect in holiness, to see every member shining in the beauty of holiness ; all this is proper, and even necessary to show our own



sincerity. In all that we sympathize with Christ ; for, he has set his heart upon the coming of that great day when the tares shall be for ever separated from the wheat ; when he shall present to himself “ a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing ; ” but shall be “ holy and without blemish.” It is then a pure zeal which can rest in nothing short of the absolute perfection of the Church, and of every member in it. But it is an unholy zeal that mingles personal hostility with church-censures ; hastening excommunication ; and, triumphing as over an enemy, instead of weeping over a brother fallen.

It has often assumed the power of the civil magistrate to purify the Church. Civil penalties for religious errors and ecclesiastical misdemeanors is one of Satan’s modes of purification. Death for offences against the Church is one of the horrid demonstrations which history furnishes, that the enemy has sown tares among the wheat. And this fiendish zeal has likewise been manifested in the demoniacal sentences of excommunication in which the Roman Church has so freely indulged. It is dreadful enough to separate one from the family of the Lord on earth ; even outwardly. But to claim a power over the unseen world ; and a commission to separate the soul of a delinquent from God and heaven for ever, from holiness and blessedness in the world to come ; surely no human being could ever have pretended to that, until he had reached those depths of blasphemy against God, and cruelty toward men, which characterize so large a part of the history of the Roman Church. It is their use of the term, excommunication, that has thrown such an excessive horribleness around it. I now inquire,

2. *How far is it practicable to purify the Church?* Not to the extent of making it as holy as heaven; not so far as to make the visible and invisible Church contain exactly the same members. Some will be in one, that are not in the other, after all that man can do. If we should attempt to prevent it, we should find ourselves at fault on every side. We do not know what degree of imperfection is consistent with the reality of piety. We make up our minds about our neighbors' characters, every day; and that may be well enough; but when we come to sit in Christ's seat, and undertake to cleanse his Church from all its unconverted members, we are undertaking a very serious work; and one, to us, impracticable. We do not know what degree of imitation is consistent with an utter absence of the reality of piety. We should turn out some that ought to remain in; and some of the most unworthy we should leave in the membership. This is not man's work; it is reserved for the angels and the last day.

What then can be done to purify the Church? Separation is one method; not turning others out, but going out. This has sometimes been the only resort; and has conduced to the progress of true religion. It was probably so in the case of the Donatists in the early ages. The Albigenses, the Lollards, and others preceded the great movement of the sixteenth century. This has been followed by limited secessions; such as that of the Puritans, the Methodists, the Orthodox churches of New England, and the Free Church of Scotland. Besides these which we approve, are many that we cannot approve. Some are to be condemned on account of the spirit which characterized them. Some, because they selected too narrow a ground of



separation ; and generally, because they formed a community spiritually no purer than that which they had left on account of its imperfections. And of the same class are those who refuse to commune with a church because it is not perfect. Christ and the apostles formed a separate Church, but with as little separation as principle would admit. They did not choose separation for its own sake. The Wesleys acted with the same wisdom and forbearance ; leaving the Church of their ancestors and their childhood, only when it was made an absolute necessity.

Another method of purifying a Church, is, reform within the Church. This is the most desirable of all processes, where it can be accomplished. It is in itself an evil, to separate from a Church ; and should be avoided when possible. The next remedy is—reformation, whether of doctrine, manners, or heart. This is the first thing pointed out in the rules of the Lord's house. He bids us, when a brother offends ; go to him alone, to persuade him to repentance and reformation. If that fails, then take some proper person to give increased weight to our persuasions ; having still his recovery chiefly in view. But if that fails, then discipline is our resort. If the Church is regarded by any merely as a voluntary association, they can make no objection to its having, like every other voluntary association, fundamental principles, and indispensable terms of entering and remaining in its fellowship. But as the household of Christ, it has his authority for cutting off offending members. “ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. And if any man obey not our word, note that

man, and have no company with him. Them that are without, God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." And the words of the Saviour are: "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you; whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."

Now the end of this disciplinary process is not to secure a perfect Church. It has many other and important ends. Having laid down terms of membership, it preserves those terms in their integrity. Whoever violates them, forfeits his rights. It aims at the good of the offending member. It is not sending him to perdition; but cutting him off from honors and privileges, to remind him of his offence, and recall him to duty. It inspires fear, and confirms the wavering. It removes a snare from before the weak. It testifies to the world against specific forms of evil. It should then be distinctly understood by the Church and the world, that admission to the Church and expulsion from the Church do not pretend to be decisions concerning any one's spiritual state, nor a claim that the Church is kept free from imperfection. In every case of admission to the Church, she expresses her satisfaction with the evidence that the person is regenerated; but with the distinct avowal that she has frequently mistaken the imitation for the reality. And so too, in excision, we do not cut off every one whom we believe to be destitute of piety. We make no pretensions to such a right, nor to the ability to discern spirits. The rules of our Church require discipline for four classes of cases—immoral conduct; breach of express covenant-vows; neglect of acknowledged religious duties; avowed disbelief of the



articles of faith in our confession. Excommunication is a solemn withdrawal of a Church from its connection with an individual. It has no violence, no wrath, no civil disabilities, but an immense social power. "Let him be to thee," says the Saviour, "as a heathen man and a publican." Where it is administered in the spirit of the Lord, it has a most salutary tendency to increase men's respect for the Church's sincerity; to keep persons from lightly entering into this solemn covenant, and from breaking their covenant with the Church, when in its membership.

But this is not plucking up the tares; for it is not aiming at the impossibility of making a perfect separation between the true and the false in the Church. It only aims to guard against certain evils which would threaten the very existence of the Church, if not checked, and which bring great discredit on religion, especially if unrebuked by the Church.

The parable exhibits another fact:

### III. THE RIGHTEOUS, PERFECT, AND FINAL EXCOMMUNICATION WILL BE PERFORMED BY THE ANGELS OF GOD.

In harvest every kind of grain is ripe, and discovers its own specific qualities. The harvest of God is coming; the day when every human being shall be known as he is. In the arrangements of that day the angels are represented as having a prominent part. They will be employed in making the great separation of the true members of the Church from the false. Then all personal imperfection in the children of God will have been removed; and in that new Church will enter no unbeliever or disobedient spirit. There the ungodly will be, by God's great executioners, bound in bundles

like tares, and cast out into utter destruction. Then will the glory of the Church of Christ be inconceivably great; an empire of pure beings, without an imperfection; such as God can perfectly love, and as can perfectly love one another. But fearful will be the companionship of those here compared to the tares. Terrible will it seem not to have loved and obeyed the Lord Jesus Christ. Tares in God's wheat field now; sown by the enemy of all good; deceiving man, but not God; at length revealed to man as they had always been, to God; having lost all the advantages of religious privileges, and now taken out of the Church, to be cast into that abyss, whose horrors can be compared only to the most incompatible of earthly sufferings; to a perpetual burning, without consumption; to a perpetual fire without a ray of light; to eternal silence, with endless weepings and wailings!"

*This parable addresses the enemies of the Church.* You have charged on her imperfection, as if it were your discovery of that which she wished to conceal. You point to this member as having no piety, and to that as not being even moral; and then pronounce the whole pretension of the Church as therefore unfounded and insincere. But it is not you, nor your class that first discovered the imperfection of the Church. Here you see its founder proclaiming it before the New Testament Church had yet an existence. And he showed that it would continue so to the end of time. He compared the preachers to fishermen who cast their nets into the sea, and drew to land fishes of all kinds; some good, and some bad. He said that tares would be sowed with the wheat; and that the separation was not to take place by human hands; nor, so long as the



Church shall be upon earth. The little Church that gathered around the Lord himself was a specimen of the Church in all ages, even the best. It was not composed of angels. Nay, one member, the master said, had a devil. But he did not excommunicate him ; because he did no overt act which would justify it. And while the rest were sincere, regenerated men, Peter had some imperfect elements of character yet ; and so had John and James, and Thomas ; and probably all, if the truth were known.

This parable is then a protest against your right of discovery as to both these facts : that there are hypocrites in the Church ; and that the members might be much improved. If you can show any defect in the ground of discipline she has laid down, or any palpable remissness in the application of them, then you may censure. Otherwise, your censure is unjust and ungenerous.

*This parable instructs the historian of the Church, and those who read Church history.* What would be the proper principles of writing the history of the medical art ? Would it be, to make it chiefly a history of diseases ? Surely not. It is just the opposite. Enough must be presented of the diseases, to show what the healing art has performed, and what it has failed to perform. But the healing process is the peculiar essential feature of the history of medical practice. The Church on earth is not the Church in heaven. It is the gathering place of a particular class of invalids out of the diseased race ; that is, such as have become willing to take the remedies, and have begun to feel their efficacy. Now they have brought much disease in with them. And many have come in, who have not

begun to be healed. And some come in to cheat themselves, taking poison instead of remedies. But he that really writes the history of the Church, or he that properly reads it, will look mainly to the realities of spiritual recovery in some, rather than the outbreaking of fresh symptoms of disease in many. What we call Church-history is valuable to a certain extent. But the great, real history is not of the tares ; it is of the wheat. The real progress of souls in holiness, the growth of the hidden life, that constitutes the true history of the Church. The record of her conflicts, and disputes, and persecutions, her relations to the powers of the earth, are all very valuable. But they are like the history of a man's clothes, and of his body. The real history of the man is the record of his soul. Look then in Church history for the wheat ; and not for the tares. The wickedest men in the Church often make the greatest figure in what is called her History, because the writer was looking for the worldly development, and not for the glorious reality which gives value to all else in the Church ; the transformation of men into God's likeness.

*This parable must modify our notions of the millennium.* The common opinion is, that there will be a great triumph of the Gospel, almost annihilating Satan's kingdom ; that then he will regain his power, and work with terrible energy, until the consummation of all things, and the eternal separation of the human family in heaven and hell. But here we are taught that the tares will continue to grow to the end. This indeed would be consistent with a great diminution in the activity of Satan for a certain period ; and it might not have been necessary to introduce that fact in this para-



able. And yet it appears to give an impression somewhat different from our commonly received notions. Satan is to be chained a thousand years. Chained with what? Is it not with telegraphic wires; railroad bars; and Bible society presses? But the diminution of his power is perhaps only relative. The Church will never in this world probably be able to remit her vigilance against him, as the enemy sowing tares. And yet

*She should be filled with hope.* The wheat and tares are not to grow together for ever; nor is the enemy to sow for ever. Here he has access to the Church, and mars every good work. There he will cease to annoy and to corrupt. Here the righteous are obscured to men and to one another by their own imperfections; there they will shine forth as the light. It will then be seen that in every truly regenerated heart a light was really enkindled, which here struggled as a spark on the waves of the sea. There it will break into the effulgence of seven suns. In this parable,

*The agency of Satan is revealed to us as a motive to vigilance and action.* "Be sober," is one injunction; "resist the devil," is another. "We are not ignorant of his devices," said a great leader. Now here we learn that he thrusts unconverted persons into the Church; thrusts in false teachers into her pulpits, as well as promotes ungodliness in real Christians. We must then counteract him in every honorable way; though not pretend nor hope to make a perfect Church.

## LECTURE XXIII.

### THE VINEYARD ; OR, THE VISIBLE CHURCH TRANSFERRED TO THE GENTILES.

MATT. XXI. 33-46. "Hear another parable : There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country : And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first : and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen ? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner : this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken : but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet."



THIS describes a breach of trust, such as finds no parallel in the history of mankind. The kingdom of God was committed to the Jewish people. They betrayed the sacred trust, and we are here called to witness their crime and its punishment. The rulers of the Church appropriate to their use all the power and glory intrusted to them; and, for this, the Church is transferred to the Gentiles. "Hear another parable," said the lord of the vineyard, who was himself the preacher;—let me open to you your own history; in the past, as you have never read it; and in the future, as you have never anticipated it. "There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard."

The point here exhibited is, that,

#### I. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S PECULIAR TREASURE.

Let it be remarked, that the visible Church must not only be regarded as distinct from the invisible,—but also the Church at any one period, and in any external form, from the Church visible considered as one and the same in every age and country. The first distinction we have had very fully before us in the parable of the wheat and tares. Of the other we have occasion to avail ourselves at present. It is beautifully exhibited by Paul, under the image of an olive tree; where he, in fact, presents the very doctrine of this parable. The olive tree represented that great organization in the world, which has sprung out of the supernatural revelations of God, and has founded itself more or less entirely on them. A multitude of its members are not made any better by being in it, and will never belong to the Church invisible, because they never joined it in spirit, but only formally and outwardly. And many

not in it will be saved ; yet it includes the true Church, and the heaven-descended religion. Our Lord declared, “salvation is of the Jews ;” that is, theirs is yet the true Church, though it will not long remain with them. And Paul says : they are “the natural branches.” Theirs was a birth-relation to the Church. But they were cut off by reason of unbelief ; and Gentiles, branches of the wild olive, were grafted in. The visible Church is then the organized body, which is founded upon supernatural revelation, and contains the true religion and the real Church or saints, or elect of God.

This Church is very precious in God’s sight. It is the vase which holds his jewels ; the fold which encloses his flock. It is his own institution ; and so dear to him, that he loves for its sake that wicked nation, so long as they retain the sacred deposit. The image of a vine and a vineyard to exhibit the Church is very frequently employed in the Scriptures. “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt ; thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root ; and it filled the land.” Isaiah says : “Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill ; and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine.” And after describing it minutely, he adds : “the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.” The nation was at that time identified with the Church. A vineyard does not come by chance. It is an object of thought and desire before it comes to exist. And because he desires to have its fruit, a man plants it. No possession among the Jews was more



highly prized. So God desired to have this organization, this institution among men. And desiring it, he formed it. "There was a certain householder which planted a vineyard." And he "let it out to husbandmen." This brings the next point before us.

## II. THE JEWISH PEOPLE WERE APPOINTED ITS GUARDIANS.

With this history we are all familiar. Abram was a Syrian, born in an idolatrous nation and family ; but called of Jehovah to receive a light which should guide him to the knowledge and worship of God, and to enter into a covenant which should insure the Church to abide with his descendants, until the Son of God should himself appear, and the way be prepared for its diffusion among all the nations of the earth. The Church received, however, no organic form, until the family of Abraham in the line of Isaac were vastly multiplied, and ready to leave their estate of subjection and go up to possess the promised land. Moses was then called ; and more richly endowed than any other mere man ever was, to form the Church and the nation, and lead them to their territory. At Mt. Sinai the ordinances of public worship and a ritual were committed to that people through the hands of Moses. And he began to compose a written code of laws, ceremonial, moral and civil ; a history and a liturgy, which were the basis of the Scriptures. The Jews entered Canaan ; and then the work of planting, hedging, digging a wine-vat, and building a tower, were all perfected. They were really "a vineyard enclosed." Their institutions were a moral hedge. They were not encouraged to be a military, nor a commercial people.

They were forbidden to intermarry with other nations. They were taught to abhor every system of idolatry. Their religion was peculiar; their moral law was altogether superior to the moral principles recognized by any other people. And then their geographical position isolated them. The desert of Paran bounded their southern states; the Mediterranean Sea, the west; the rugged mountains of Lebanon, the north; and their eastern frontier was a water boundary, excepting a few tribes that preferred to live beyond the Jordan. "I, saith the Lord, will be a wall of fire round about." "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people." Thus was the vineyard hedged in. And every facility was furnished for their becoming a nation of saints, a godly people, preserving the true religion in its purity, and honoring God in a godless world. And this vineyard, it is said, in conformity with eastern customs, was let or farmed out to husbandmen. The Church was committed to the people of Israel. The owner then removed to a foreign land. And at the time of vintage he sent agents to get the returns,—as the custom was to farm on shares. But instead of welcoming their Lord's commissioners, they refused to make returns; insulted and injured, and even murdered them, in various forms. The owner hearing of this, sent a more respectable body of men to claim his rent. They were treated in the same manner. Still lenient, and disposed to recall them to their duty, he determined to send his well-beloved son, saying to himself—"Surely they will respect him, and treat him differently." But when they saw him approach, they said, "Now let us get him out of the way, and we shall hear no more of these claims;



but remain in undisturbed possession, and enjoy this magnificent farm in our own way." This is a graphic outline of the whole history of that nation, from the time of Joshua to David; from Rehoboam to the captivity; and from the restoration to the destruction of their capital, and the dismemberment of their nation.

### III. THE JEWISH NATION WAS UNFAITHFUL TO ITS TRUST.

This was manifested variously.

1. *They rejected the moral government of Jehovah.* The Church was incorporated in their nation, that they might become personally religious. The clear light of a revelation of God's being and character shone on them. They were taught in what holiness consists. But as a people, they seldom attained to a very high degree of moral excellence. They would not love God with all their hearts, nor obey him. Then,

2. *They rejected his political control as the head of their theocracy.* You remember that they continually inclined to adopt the idolatry of their neighbors. But, setting up the shrine or image of Baal or Ashtaroath, was a civil as well as a moral crime; it was treason against Jehovah. They rejected his ambassadors too, as is particularly stated in the parable. The Jewish prophets were the most wonderful race of men the world has ever seen. Look, for example, at Elijah, a star of heaven shining on a dark night of time, and of the Church. He came to assert Jehovah's right to be Israel's God. But the priests of Baal, through the instigation of Jezebel, well nigh secured his destruction. Jeremiah, too, suffered the severest persecution at the hands of his countrymen. Isaiah was sawed asunder.

Thus were they treated, down to John the Baptist. "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they wandered in sheep-skins and goat-skins, and hid in the caves of the earth ; men, of whom the world was not worthy." But they were thus hated, and thus treated, because they asserted God's claims to men's affections and obedience. This treatment of the ambassadors was rebellion against their king ; which, in fact, they had manifested in exchanging the simpler form of government for the regal. But the climax was in the rejection of their king in person. God had resorted to reproofs, to remonstrance, and to very sore chastisements ; but all was in vain. There now remained one more experiment, one more effort of mercy before the dreadful sentence should pass that would visit on their guilty heads the long catalogue of their national crimes. The Son of God came to assert his Father's claims. As soon as they discovered the real nature of his mission, they conceived the most malignant hatred for him. They envied his lofty character and sublime elevation above themselves. They dreaded his success, which would despoil them of all that gratified their selfish desires. They smarted under his holy rebukes. They hated the light of his doctrine, enforced by his life. And they cried out, "Away with him ; crucify him, crucify him. His blood be on us, and on our children !" They took him out of the city, and so "cast him out of the vineyard."

When Christ had reached this point of his story, he appealed to his very enemies—what shall the lord of the vineyard "do to these husbandmen ?" They replied justly : "He will wretchedly destroy those wicked men, and let out his vineyard to other husbandmen,



which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.”  
And so it was.

#### IV. THE SACRED TRUST WAS TRANSFERRED TO OTHER PEOPLES AND NATIONS.

That this would ever occur, the Jews could not believe. So strongly had the idea of their being the favorites of heaven become fixed in their minds ; so firmly were they persuaded that they were the Church of God, and always should be ; so fully satisfied were they that they had a native purity, and the Gentiles a native corruption, which should ever keep secure the children of Abraham in the possession of their ecclesiastical elevation, that they dared to defy God himself to dispossess them. Now, for two thousand years the covenant with Abraham had existed ; and for more than a thousand years they had insulted God as a moral governor, as a God of holiness, on the strength of his promise to their great ancestor. Nothing but such a long life of national crime could have prepared them for the last crowning act.

When that audience had virtually pronounced their nation's doom, then Christ added, with a fearful sublimity of poetic utterance :

“ Did ye never read in the Scriptures ;  
The stone which the builders rejected,  
The same is become the head of the corner ;  
This is the work of the Lord,  
And wonderful in our eyes ?

Therefore I say unto you ;  
The kingdom of God shall be taken from you,  
And given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.  
And whosoever shall fall against this stone, shall be bruised ;  
And on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to pieces.”

These facts bring us to a specific consideration of the last point of the parable.

V. THEY WERE FEARFULLY PUNISHED AS A NATION.

The Jewish method of stoning was by dashing the criminal against a rock ; and if that did not kill him, he was taken to an elevated scaffold and pushed down, and a huge stone was thrown upon him. So here it is said, the stone which is head of the corner of the kingdom of God, or the Church, will be a stone for this people to be dashed against ; and then to complete their destruction, he will fall upon them and crush them as a Church, as a nation. In the siege of Jerusalem, Josephus says, more than one million Jews perished, and in horrible forms of death. His blood was upon them and their children. Fearfully did the righteousness of Jehovah visit upon that generation "all the blood that was shed, from the blood of righteous Abel," to the blood of Jesus.

We are here led to admire the sublime features of the scheme of Providence ! Ezekiel had some such conception of it as brought to his imagination under the symbol of immense wheels, like the rings of Saturn or our zodiacal belt, arching over the breadth of the heavens ; a wheel within a wheel, full of eyes ; instinct with life ; going straightforward on the path in which the spirit led them. Then the vision was changed to wonderful creatures combining the highest qualities of the animal and human race. And above them all was a throne glorious to behold ; for Providence is but the external part of the administration of a perfect moral government



The wonder of Providence is, that it should leave so open the sphere of free agency to numberless intelligent beings, and yet carry them and their actions along, like the currents of the sea, to its own issues ; yea, it even makes sin the instrument of holiness, and rebellion to promote the stability of his government !

The election of God, against which man so much rails, is the supreme exercise of divine benevolence and wisdom. To see how this is we must often wait to the end. Now in the case of the Jews we have seen the end. “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated ;” was the language of the Sovereign ruler of men. But why was Jacob thus selected ; simply to pet and caress one race of men ? By no means : God was seeking an ark for his Noah ; a depository for his Church ; an envelope to that seed of life which should bless the nations in the fulness of time. He appeared indeed, often, to be dealing with them in the most partial manner of parental fondness ; “giving men for them, Egypt and Ethiopia for their ransom.” But he was ever looking to the largest and most beneficent results to the human family. Idolatry had so penetrated the world as to make it impossible to stay it, but by throwing all the guards of national feeling around the doctrines and institutions of the Divine unity, and a pure religion. The men of fifty generations will go on and perish in the abominations of heathenism ; but the current can ultimately be turned, and a bright era dawn on mankind, provided the Church can get a lodgment on earth ; and slowly develope its own principles, and come to a confirmed maturity, before it is committed to a rude and open conflict with the powers of darkness.

Then the Jewish history illustrates many principles of great importance. God has by it manifested his condescension and goodness. His paternal feelings could find no exercise toward the nations of the earth; nor even toward the Jews, considered in themselves. Therefore to show the strength and tenderness of those feelings in himself, he selected a people whom he could perpetually love, on two grounds: their connection with Abraham, his friend, and their connection with his Church. And oh! what treatment did they receive on these grounds; ever heightened in its manifestation of tenderness and strength by their personal wickedness and contempt of him! "For my name's sake do I this," he would often say. That is, I would have men understand that I am kind; that I have a father's heart. If I manifest it in my treatment of men indiscriminately, they will take advantage of it, and imagine that I am indifferent to their sins. But I do it to this chosen generation, just to let men see what is in my heart. I am not partial. My particular election has reference to an ultimate general benefit. And what could so exhibit his patience and forbearance as the long periods of their utter declension! Year after year these husbandmen occupied his vineyard, and no returns of its products were made to him. "Ye have robbed me, even this whole nation," was his charge. Messenger after messenger was sent. But whether it was Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah the elegiac poet, or Isaiah the seraphic; they seized his servants, stoning one, beating another, and killing another. And then, after all that, he sent his Son, as it is said in Mark: "Having yet therefore one Son, his well-beloved, he sent him also." This is one of the sins which Nehe-



miah so humbly confesses : “ They were disobedient, and rebelled against thee ; and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets, which testified against them.” And Jehovah thus remonstrates with them by Jeremiah : “ I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early, and sending them, and saying, ‘ Oh, do not this abominable thing.’ But they hearkened not.” Thus this history illustrates the depravity of man, his vile ingratitude to God, and his contempt of the lofty ends which God proposes to him. And, finally, it gave occasion to present the world an overwhelming exhibition and vindication of the justice of God. The Deluge was a fearful revelation of it. So was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But the casting down of Israel, the rejection of Abraham’s children, was the crowning act. How can any man doubt that their destruction was an act of God’s government, a positive, awful punishment, when Christ threatened them again and again with this as a punishment ; not as a progressive advancement of that people, not as a part of the Divine goodness, but as Paul denominates it, “ the severity of God ! ” These are some of the great ends secured by a wonder-working Providence in the history of that peculiar people.

We are taught here again *that there is a great responsibility on the nations, communities and individuals, to which God commits his Church.* Before Jerusalem had fallen, and the temple perished, the Church had begun to find a place among the Gentiles. Even Samaria, and Rome, and the luxurious Corinth had received the sacred trust. And quickly all Europe, Asia, eastern and northern Africa had received it. And the

most instructive pages of human history there begin. How fared the Church of God in these nations, is the question; and the answer teaches us many great lessons. The presence of the Church has been the greatest blessing any nation has enjoyed; and the continuance of the Church, or its removal has, in some cases, depended on the fidelity with which the trust has been kept; and the corruption of the Church has ever been the curse of a nation. This opens too large a section of history to follow now. But look for an illustration of one of these points, at Asia Minor. They were unfaithful as a people; so were they in India, in Syria; and what have been the consequences? The candlestick has been removed; the kingdom has been transferred; the vineyard is given to other husbandmen. And we, from this wilderness, are now sending the light back to the eastern churches; the Bible to Corinth and Thessalonica, to Patmos and Antioch and Jerusalem, where large portions of it were written under the guidance of the Spirit of God.

Then again look at the influence of the Church in creating the civilization of mediæval Europe, when the northern barbarians had swept away the old Roman civilization and the institutions it had formed. Look then again at the nations which exterminated the revivers of pure religion in the sixteenth century, and contrast them with those which welcomed them; and mark the difference that characterizes their subsequent history.

It is expected of a people having the Church of God among them, that they shall regard it with favor; respect its rights, and leave it an open field for its legitimate action. That is all that truly devolves on legisla-



tors and rulers. Then, on the individuals composing a nation, God lays personal responsibilities. They are to receive his messages, and return him the fruits of all that his grace has done for them. In a word, God expects us to become Christians under Christian institutions. And whoever refuses this claim, so far provokes God to remove his privileges. I know we of this country feel quite secure against Providence now. We have got so far out of the region of supernatural causes; we have got such regularity in our lines of steamboats, and railroads, and found so much gold, and become so mighty, that God himself cannot terrify us now. "Be not high-minded, but fear," says Paul to the Gentiles who have received the vineyard. The caution pertains to nations. For, the Saviour says, the vineyard shall be "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." And if any nation possessing it, is not meeting that description, it may be that God can find a way to make another transfer of it. It pertains to all denominations of Christians equally. The Reformed churches had a great trust. But those in Germany and France have lost their high position. The Church of England had a great trust; but she lost it, just so far as she was unfaithful. The Methodist Church received the kingdom gloriously. But she has not kept her high ground. The Puritans have lost a part of their power. Let nations, churches, and individuals understand that the vineyard they occupy belongs to another, a Lord who has gone on a journey; but is continually sending commissioners to receive his dues. And if we are unfaithful, he himself will come, and take the matter in hand.

But the parable has yet a closer personal application.

*We are the husbandmen.* Our birth is in a Christian land, a nation possessing that glorious institution, the Christian Church, with its Sabbaths, sanctuaries, Bibles, worship, instructions and Christian fellowship. Now, the nation may be so far faithful to its trust, that God shall not remove these privileges from it. But we, personally, may starve at a full table; we may become blind, and grope at noon-day. God deals with communities as such; with individuals as individuals. Are we returning to the owner of the vineyard our share of the fruits? Those fruits have the remarkable quality of enriching you, by being returned to their owner. If you give God the first fruits of your heart; love, trust, gratitude; warm, earnest, supreme, you are richer than if you had the treasures of all kingdoms. If you give God the best hours of the day, you are more profited than if you had a century exchanged for each of those hours, to work for yourself, in any way. If you lay down every selfish interest and pursuit, and make the glory of God the great end of your being, you get a higher title of nobility than if you toiled through a long life like Nelson or Wellington, to get a few fading earthly honors.

My hearer, you are in the Lord's vineyard. You must hear his messengers. In his name they say—"My son, give me thy heart"—thy time—thy talents. You must cease living for yourself, and live for Christ. God says: "They will reverence my Son." How reasonable the expectation. He expects it of you. To-day, will you then hear the Son of God! He comes and claims your heart. He wants your penitential trust, your fervent, grateful love. He wants you to obey and follow him. Surely you will reverence such



a messenger ! But, if not, then another one is coming, who will speak no words of persuasion ; but with a resistless grasp, thrust you out of the vineyard, as unworthy longer to be a steward ! Neither life, nor privileges, nor happiness are yours by right ; you are a tenant at will. Despise not the will of him who holds your being and your blessings in his hands.

## LECTURE XXIV.

### THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED ; OR, THE PERPETUITY AND ULTIMATE PREVALENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

MATT. XIII. 31, 32. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field : which indeed, is the least of all seeds ; but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

THIS unpretending similitude occupies the sublimest ground of prophecy ; presenting, under a simple botanical symbol, the same great theme which animated the loftiest strains of Isaiah, David, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

The occasion of its announcement indicates the regard our Saviour had for his people's fears and solitudes in reference to his kingdom ; for he had just intimated that of four classes of hearers only one would believe his word ; and had represented the Church, not as a body of purified saints, but as a field abounding equally in tares and wheat. By the side of these depressing anticipations he then introduces the animating prophecy contained in this comparison.

The mustard seed had become proverbial among the Jews, simply for its littleness, although smaller



seeds are known. The proverb had probably tended to fix the attention of men on this one feature. In referring to it therefore, our Lord seems to say: "All you notice about the mustard seed is its diminutive size. Now, I would remind you that any seed, however small and obscure, and even having no appearance of vitality, yet contains within itself a hidden power of growth, which only requires favoring circumstances to burst the rough, dry shell, and clothe it with the vigorous and beautiful form of vegetable life." Yet this most diminutive seed (he probably spoke of the *Salvadora Persica*, or *Khardal*) can put forth a tree with branches, on which the birds may rest.

I propose now to consider, with you, the meaning of the parable, and, its truthfulness. Reduced to its simplest expression, the truth here taught is,—that the kingdom of Christ has two opposite phases, accordingly as it is seen by the eye of sense, or the eye of faith. It admits that there is an appearance of feebleness in that kingdom; but shows that feebleness to exist only in the outward manifestation; to be apparent, not real; relative, not absolute; the ultimate success of this cause being a question, not of possibility, nor even of probability, but merely of time.

The institution, Church, or kingdom, which the Son of God is establishing in this world, is among the most unpromising of institutions in its origin and instruments, as it meets the eye of a worldly wisdom; so that nothing but a supernatural faith could have dared to hope for its endurance, had but half the array of power been seen, that was about to hinder its progress and dispute its right to exist.

Were this a contest between abstract truth and

falsehood, before a fair tribunal ; were it a struggle of right with wrong before the bar of eternal justice, the case would be very different ; for righteousness and justice would neither have been deceived by any semblances, nor bribed by any appeals to a selfish passion. Were it merely a trial of God's omnipotence with creature-strength, there would be no occasion for comparing this institution to a grain of mustard seed. But it is not so. It is Truth and Righteousness seeking to gain the perverted heart of man. Omnipotence is indeed on the side of this cause, kingdom, or Church. But physical power must make no direct interference in a moral conflict ; the triumph of which is to put the crown on the head of truth and righteousness. Omnipotence had its triumph when it created the visible out of the invisible, existence from non-existence. But the triumph of the Son of God over Satan is to be infinitely more glorious. His coronation-day will be the inauguration of truth and love, in a universe once devastated by deceit and malignity. The present temporary feebleness of truth lies in its unadaptedness to the perverted tastes of the human race. The present transitory power of Satan lies in the suitableness of his kingdom to those corrupted and perverted tastes. The earthly and palpable forces are therefore mainly on Satan's side ; while Christ's resources are spiritual, invisible, and heavenly.

We then direct our attention to,

I. THE FEEBLENESS OF CHRIST'S CAUSE, either in approaching the individual human heart, or in its bolder onset upon vast communities. In the first it is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, to men in the



turmoil and excitement of the city ; inviting them to come from their gains and gaieties to its solitude and sobriety. If you would know the weakness of the Gospel, try it to-morrow upon the first man you meet. The probabilities are nine to ten against your success. It is like the siege of Sebastopol, which had a series of formidable fortresses, being one within the other. The attention is defended by a great exterior earth-mound. When that is taken, you meet successively a stern resistance from error, prejudice, passion, torpor of conscience and of the religious sensibilities, insubordination and obstinacy.

This is indeed but one form of opposition to Christ. Yet all the other forms of opposition spring from this, and fortify it. They would have existence without it. But it can exist and act where none of them are found. And to him who knows his own heart, this is, at last, the one supreme hindrance to the progress of the Gospel. The Gospel aims to make every man know himself to be a fool. "If any man thinketh he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Who can welcome that? It makes all our righteousness, sin. Who can bear that? It makes all our strength, weakness. It shows our danger to be imminent and awful ; our hopes to be vain and illusive ; our religion to be irreligion ; our affections, idolatrous ; our purposes and pursuits, selfish ; and the end, shame, despair, and ruin. There the Gospel meets every child of Adam. And until it has brought us to a thorough acquiescence in its declarations of the existence of these painful truths, it has no promise, no gentler words to offer. Can such a system make its way in this world, with this human race? When men have no

conception of their need of its great remedy, will they be willing to submit to its regimen! Nay, will they who have no conception of the evil of sin, believe the Scripture warnings to have any foundation? That is precisely the inquiry the Saviour replies to in this parable. That Gospel, so unpalatable, so unworldly, so contrary to the biases of the human heart and the current of the world, is going to gain men until the race is brought over by it. To worldly wisdom it appears most improbable. It has not a single source of power which sustains other institutions. It has no military establishment; wealth furnishes it no help in this negotiation with the heart. Talent and learning may commend it to the understanding; and through it affect the sensibilities. But to gain the heart and the will to Christ and righteousness, they have no power. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed."

But this weakness is more prominently visible when seen in its attempts to convert a nation, or to mould human society. What are its aims, its claims and pretensions? An entire overthrow of the dominant philosophies, religions, customs, and social institutions; an imperative demand on a people to abandon their most cherished notions, and render an entire and cordial submission to Christ and his laws. What then are the instruments of its attack compared with those of defence against it? Poverty against wealth; an unarmed band of peaceful men against a religion defended by the whole military power of a kingdom; strangers contending with men native to the soil.

But I would now direct your attention more definitely to this formidable array of worldly influences against the kingdom of Christ.



We begin our description with that intellectual opposition of Satan, before which the Gospel has appeared feeble and contemptible. The world's leader has more intellect than the world itself. The anti-Christian philosophers are not inventors. They have merely studied in a school, and under a master whom they have never even had the gratitude to thank or acknowledge. Did they know all the facts in their own mental history, there would be a substituting of shame for pride, of horror for self-gratulation. The intellectual opposition the Gospel has encountered must be attributed to Satan, because it has been too profound, too protracted, too unceasing, for mere human agency, uninstigated and unguided by a superior power. For eighteen hundred years this antagonism has been steadily maintained; now by direct attack; now producing a rival philosophy; now subtly corrupting the Christian doctrine. There is nothing in the doctrines and facts of the Gospel adapted to satisfy the philosophical taste, as it is developed by a worldly education. The first teachers of Christian doctrine rejected the pretensions of all the thought-inventors of their day to meet the soul's real necessities. They substituted facts for speculation, and authoritative dogma for man-originated theories or the unaided discoveries of the human understanding; thus demolishing every throne of pride, casting down splendid fabrics of fancy and every lofty imagination, leaving no room for self-conceit, and no ground for boasting. The primitive teachers received and imparted every thing in the simplicity of children, as a direct gift from heaven; rejecting the whole fabric of pantheistic philosophy, and the pride it cherished; regarding faith as a higher

form of mental action than speculation. They lifted their warning voices earnestly against the enemy, as he should assume this guise. "I know," said Paul, "that, after my departing shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. In the last days perilous times shall come; there shall arise men ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth; men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." And very soon the Ebionites, Marcionites, Judaizers, Nicolaitans, Doketæ and Gnostics engaged in this work. Thus there were opened three deep fountains of error, whose deadly waters were designed to drown and sweep away this budding, heaven-descended germ; the Jewish superstition, the Oriental Gnosticism, and the prolific Grecian philosophies. The philosophers made no direct attack, so far as we know, until Celsus appeared, toward the end of the second century. They indeed affected to despise Christianity, until some of their own number, such as Justin, Athenagoras, Pantænus and others had become its advocates, and exposed to public gaze the almost universal wickedness of the pagan philosophers, as well as the falseness of their theories. Then the war commenced; and it has never ceased, to this day. Ammonius, Crescens, Fronto, Porphyry, and the apostate emperor Julian, all followed on in this line of hostility. With the fall of the Roman empire, this form of opposition ceased, to a great extent, to be revived on the continent by Spinoza, and in Great Britain by Herbert, Hobbes, Collins, Tindal, Hume and others. It was taken up in France by the Encyclopedists; in America, by Paine and Jefferson. It then went forward in a still more profoundly philosophical spirit,



and sustained by much greater learning, in Germany. Some of these opponents have contented themselves with attacking the Gospel; while others have, but with little success, constructed rival schemes of philosophy. Another form of this opposition has been, the corruption of Christ's doctrine by alteration and mixture. In the early ages Judaism, dead and formal, was brought into it by the Ebionites and Nazarines. Then the Oriental theories were grafted on it by the Doketæ, the Manicheans, and the Gnostics; and the Grecian, by the Neo-Platonists. Then the Montanists interwove the ascetic system with its pure principles, and the anti-Trinitarians began the work of constructing a rationalistic Gospel. And, to this day, this process of corrupting the Gospel continues in Christian countries.

Now, the power of these intellectual antagonists to the Gospel was manifold and prodigious. They were immensely varied, and thus had the advantage of suiting the various tastes of nations, communities, and individuals. Their mutual opposition to each other furnished very partial relief to Christianity; for, in their opposition to that, they were not divided, but united. Many of them had the right of occupation and prescription; venerable by their antiquity, and more venerable by the mighty names that had professed their principles. And, above all, they suited the grosser and cherished principles of human nature, while the Gospel suits only its nobler, but almost extinguished aspirations. And now in our day, by the side of a brilliant Pantheism, Mormonism and Necromancy have taken the field, not unsuccessfully, with their degrading fooleries, suited to men's depraved inclinations.

And while it has these formidable difficulties to encounter at home, all its missionary efforts among the more populous nations have met with a powerful resistance from existing systems of philosophy and false religion; especially in Eastern and Southern Asia among the Buddhists and Brahmins, and among the Mohammedans and corrupted Christian sects of Western Asia.

Many among us appear not to be aware of the prodigious intellectual acuteness and activity which once characterized the Oriental mind. We seem to think the Brahmins are and ever have been a set of stupid fanatics; whereas the facts of the case are these:—the Brahminic system, intellectually considered, is the result of intense thought, vast conceptions, and profound speculation; it is also the prolific fountain of some of the profoundest speculations of Grecian or German philosophy. And its theology is really august and venerable when contrasted with the puny superstitions of the Roman Church, which are frequently only a childish imitation of the Indian conception. The Oriental doctrines of good works and purgatory, for example, are intellectually sublime; while those of Rome are simply puerile.

We next meet the opposition of the civil, religious and ecclesiastical powers of the world. I put the civil with the religious, because magistrates have generally been tools of the priests in persecuting the Church.

The first appeared in the Jewish Rabbis. They sat in Moses' seat; having all the authority and influence that could be conferred by a divine appointment, a most venerable antiquity, and an illustrious succession of great and good men in the office. They had conse-



quently a powerful hold on the minds of their people which they set against the person, doctrines, and influence of Christ. Truly he was a grain of mustard seed, in their eyes, and in most other human eyes ; but especially when they had secured him on the cross, buried him under the guardianship of seal and sentry, and scattered his discouraged followers to the four winds of heaven. These disciples rallied indeed, after his resurrection ; but the opposition of the Sanhedrim was powerful throughout Judea.

Nor were the embarrassments encountered by the apostles terminated when they left the boundaries of Judea ; for there, beside the obstacles raised by the Jews, they encountered another and still more terrible form of ecclesiastical opposition, in the pagan priesthood, whose influence was likewise immense ; being derived from a moral power over the people, fortified by a collusion with the civil powers, and often by an identification with them. They had wrought the people up to an intense hostility to the earliest disciples and their teachers, by representing them as enemies of the religion of their country, and as a body of men unworthy of confidence. They had wrought up the public mind to such a point of superstitious hatred and dread of the Christians, that, as Tertullian says, “they attributed every public calamity to them. If the Tiber overflowed ; or, if the Nile did not overflow ; if the heavens stood still, or the earth moved ; if there was famine or drought, the cry was instantly heard, murmuring and swelling like an angry sea : throw the ‘ Christians to the lions.’ ” And by their immense power with the emperor, he, in fact, being by his office the head of the priesthood, they procured the most formidable enact-

ments against the Church. Now, what was this little band of missionaries; entering alone, unarmed, unbefriended, into the great cities of the empire, to contend, with only spiritual weapons, against this formidable power! And, what was a poor little church, gathered in some obscure house, before the Neros and Domitians, the mighty Cæsars of Rome! This, truly, is the grain of mustard seed.

Another antagonistic form of ecclesiastical power is—the Papacy; a system founded on the truth, because it has been an incessant corruption of the primitive truth. There was a time when men were but grown children; and there were not educational means to raise the masses above that condition. They probably then needed very strict parental government on the part of the clergy, who were almost the only educated men. Benevolent pastors then used the power they possessed, for the good of their flocks. But the love of power grew with the possession; and the perversion grew with the love of it, until the most formidable enemy the Church of Christ at length had to contend with, was, a part of the legitimate Christian Church by descent; the venerable Roman branch of the Church catholic, or rather its clergy.

Another formidable obstacle to the progress of the Gospel has been found in the customs and institutions of society. As one of many instances, select either that of caste, of polygamy, or the pagan estimate of woman and the family. When our missionary enters an Indian village, he finds a perfect social organization devised by a superhuman intellect, all prepared as Sebastopol was for the allies, by a long, sly, far-reaching



foresight, to make the mightiest power of attack contemptible.

But, as already remarked, the root or essence of all the relative feebleness of the Gospel is found at last farther back than in priesthoods, philosophies, or institutions. These are public; acting on masses and communities; that operates in the individual heart; apparently distinct from them all, yet in reality the source of them all; more formidable than them all, while in appearance the feeblest of them all.

These are the earthly forces arrayed against the kingdom of Christ. And this is the feature of the case, illustrated by the size and appearance of the mustard seed. But there is another aspect. God assures us that

## II. THE HEAVENLY AND DIVINE FORCES ARE WITH AND WITHIN THAT KINGDOM.

That little grain has in it a divine life; is preserved by a divine care, and quickened by a divine power. It must then grow, and in the fulness of time become a great tree; even filling the earth with its shade, its shelter, its fruit, and the beauty of its form.

We have just said that *the providence of God is on its side*. One declaration of Scripture is sufficient confirmation, for it includes many others. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." He is therefore anointed King on the holy hill of Zion, "head *over all things* to his Church." Although, as has been remarked, this is not a trial of physical strength, yet it is a very significant fact that he who is at the head of this kingdom, must give to each of his enemies his being and his faculties, and must constantly preserve them all in existence.

*His, too, is the residue of that Divine Spirit, who has, as yet, but partially manifested his power on the earth ; as in the scene of Pentecost, the great Reformation, and the gradual christianizing of nations.*

And all this is crowned by *the clear and full promise of the Father, that this cause shall prevail.* Let them who will, doubt if such a promise has been given ; but to them who believe, there is an assurance that heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than that the Son of God shall fail to come off conqueror in this tremendous conflict. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his anointed.

And we are no longer to regard this promise as merely prophetic. To the ancient Church, it was ; to us it is partly historical. To select one illustration from a thousand : when the Lord of life, the founder of this kingdom was laid, a silent corpse, in his sepulchre, the kingdom was like a grain of mustard seed fallen upon the ground to be for ever unseen, lost, and forgotten. But the promise of the Father, often repeated by himself, was, that he should rise from among the dead and ascend to the throne of heaven. He is risen ; and in that resurrection is the virtual fulfilment of the whole promise. That resurrection is the living seed of all future history. This is to the believer proof conclusive. But there are other considerations which the unbeliever can appreciate. One is :

*The adaptedness of the Gospel to convert man.* Whatever conclusions science may reach concerning the physical origin of the human races, observation and Scripture show that God has constituted a complete moral unity, with boundless diversity, not only



of national, but also of individual or personal properties. "God hath made of one blood all men." And we find alike in all, that while the germ of spiritual life is so paralyzed that only the Spirit of God can re-quicken it, yet that germ is there, in so far as that the Gospel finds every man a man, though fallen; not a block, nor a brute. The conversion of the world is, after all, to be an individual change; whether in one soul at a time, or ten thousand, it matters not. The weakness of the Gospel therefore lies in the fact that it is opposed to the predominating influences in the soul; but it has also friends within the citadel, and there is its strength. The judgment, when it can fairly see the Gospel, sees the wisdom of its requirements, the harmony of the system with the constitution of nature and of man. And a growing experience and acquaintance with human experience more fully convince us that the author of nature is the author of the Gospel. An expanding observation shows its transforming and elevating power in individuals and communities. The terms and conditions of salvation are seen to be perfectly reasonable and divinely generous. Then the judgment sees, too, that it is only the Gospel that proposes to man objects worthy of his pursuit; while it alone truly points out his difficulties, and furnishes a relief from them. The conscience of every man is with the Gospel, whether he knows it or not. Men have pretended to find conscientious objections to it. But it was a pretence. The Gospel is the only efficacious enemy of sin; the law operating alone is sincere in its opposition to sin, but powerless. The Gospel deals with the conscience where it enters, and scatters to the winds the objections of the speculative under-

standing. It has a friend in every noble sentiment of the heart. The heart yearns for such compassion as the Saviour breathed ; for such love as there weeps and bleeds and dies for us. It wants such a hope as is there proffered. These are intrinsic elements of power, which make us see it to be the wisdom and power of God ; though it be to the Greek folly, and weakness in the worldling's eye. The builders may reject this corner-stone, but God will make it the head of the corner. It has been laid in troublous times ; but the top-stone must yet come forth amid the acclamations of men and angels. The kingdom of God is no accident, no child of chance, no invention of short-sighted, feeble-handed man. It is the purpose of him who laid the foundations of the earth, and spread abroad the heavens. And he has declared that this stone, cut out of the mountains without hands, shall fill the earth. It goes forth still as insignificant as a grain of mustard seed, attended not with pomp and civil power. But you see it working with men as individuals, having a voice for the men of every nation and age. It comes even to the children. Numbers against it are nothing. The adults of this generation may be furious in their hostility ; but it shall enter the hearts of their children and grandchildren, and change their hostility to fervent friendship. The queen of Madagascar may try to crush this little seed ; but her successor shall nurture and defend it with all the influences of the throne.

The strength of this argument lies in both its natural and its supernatural aspect. Naturally, we should infer that a system of philosophy or religion which met the known and profoundest wants of mankind would ultimately become universal. Looking to the



supernatural aspect of it, we should say this adaptation is so far an expression of the Creator's purpose, which, while not an absolute proof of ultimate prevalence, powerfully combines with other evidences to prove it.

But we must bestow a notice upon still another feature of the subject,—*the historical development of Christianity; which strongly confirms this prophetic announcement.*

I propose, then, the further confirmation of this prophecy, uttered eighteen centuries ago, by a brief glance at the religious history of those centuries.

What says the record of that period concerning the growth of this mustard seed?

*That it has survived the destruction or paralysis of all its earlier rivals.*

Where are the writings of Celsus, the theories of the Manichees, the imperial productions of Julian? No man but the curious scholar knows them. But where are the history and sayings of Jesus Christ; the words of Paul? They are now rendered into more than one hundred and fifty languages, and with the increasing power of steam-presses promising to shake their leaves in the breezes of every land, before the century shall have expired. The only surviving doctrine of the early heresies that I can trace to our day, as now occupying a prominent position, is the denial of the Trinity. Whether this is gaining ground, each of us must judge for himself. The Gospel has not only survived these attacks, and outlived these rival and antagonist influences, it has also

*Identified itself with the practical intelligence of the world.* It has for fifteen centuries accompanied all the higher developments of man. Grecian and Roman

civilization failed to accompany man beyond a certain point. And when they ceased, nothing was left to take their place but Christianity. These were the last successful efforts of the human mind to create an unchristian civilization on a broad scale. But Christianity took man up where they left him, and has gone on ever since, hand in hand with him. Commerce, the arts, agriculture, freedom and education flourish most where its influence is the most complete. The most christianized nations are now the strongest nations. The nation now most rapidly developing its own resources, to the surprise of the world, is that whose European ancestry were most faithful to the Gospel of Christ, and in which Christian institutions have most thoroughly penetrated the hearts of the people. And, moreover,

*It is now growing, while every opposing system of philosophy and religion is waning.* Hindooism in its two forms is, by the admission of its votaries, losing its power over the Indian mind. The greatest modern German philosopher, Schelling, was called on recently to address an assembly in Berlin, composed in part of the élite of the kingdom. It was an hour of deep solemnity, when amid that brilliant throng of two thousand people, numbering many distinguished philosophers and scholars of Prussia, the venerable man gave utterance to the single expression—"after all our labors, our philosophy is but negative." The effect was electric. It fell like a hammer on the hearts of those who had considered the German philosophy as the almost divine attainment of the human mind. Almost the same thing was uttered by the champion of Unitarianism in this country, after he had retired from the heat of the conflict. I speak not now of the



future, of which I have no doubt; that it will confirm this prophecy of Scripture; but of the present I say with confidence, amid all the agitations of the human mind, and the activity of an anti-Christian spirit, there is a steady growth in the human race of this conviction, the words of Christ are eternal truth.

Then, to this we may add one other historical testimony,—the decays which this tree has undergone have never sapped its life. Indeed it is most interesting to see how the evidence is accumulating, that life has never been wholly extinguished in the Church, even in the times of most general apostasy; to mark how, in the midst of general degeneracy and the corruption of Christianity, when religion seems to have become merely a hollow mask, there have always remained a portion in whom spiritual life still had a place. Seven thousand in the olden time were left hidden from the eye, even of the zealous Elijah, faithful to Jehovah; when the king, the priests, the prophets and the nation had bowed the knee to Baal. So there was a faithful remnant when the Lord appeared in the Jewish Church. Simeon and Anna, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary were still faithful. The Roman Church declined from the faith; and, like the great dragon in the Apocalypse, swept the stars out of heaven with its tail. But the Albigenses, Waldenses, Hussites and Lollards too, were found, those who preceded the great Reformation; that glorious movement, in whose history we see the principle of this parable illustrated, and its truth confirmed. There is a vital power in the Church which may suffer sad decays and declensions. But, like the bulbous root that lies in the earth, when winter has cut down every flower and leaf, nay, the very trunk itself, yet it only

waits the breath of spring to invigorate it again, and call it into new life and growth and fruitfulness.

At this day, the contest with Rome appears to some dubious. To them we cannot cite this struggle as an evidence of the truth of the parable. But to our own view the grain of mustard seed is growing, and outgrowing the limits to which that ungodly hierarchy would limit it. I refer, for example, to that great movement now taking place in southwestern Europe. Spain and Sardinia, two of the most zealous and unscrupulous supporters of the Papal despotism, are now provoking their spiritual Lord to extremely hazardous measures of revenge and intimidation, by their invasion of the monastic system, that pillar of Popery. That indeed is a political measure; but it weakens the hands of Popery as a religious system. Another fact illustrates and confirms the statement here made. While Ireland alone has been sending two million Romanists to this country within the last ten years, the Roman Church, on high authority, is said not to have increased in numbers here within that time. The fact that the Roman hierarchy are now forced upon the Roman people by military power, will further confirm the conviction that the moral power of that despotism is gone, and that it can less and less obstruct the progress of the pure Gospel. The same may be said of all the alliances of the civil and ecclesiastical powers. Since the day of the Puritan separation to the present, established churches have a diminished power to obstruct the progress of the Gospel and a spiritual religion. The noble movement in Scotland headed by Dr. Chalmers, is a sublime illustration of the vital power there is in the Church of Christ. Go forth now



and contemplate the six thousand Protestant missionaries with their sixteen thousand assistants. And if we should adopt the Roman Catholic method of computation, we should show 22,000 for their 6,070. We are spending for four institutions\* \$2,720,000 annually. There are more than 3,000,000 Bibles annually distributed; making, within this century, 40,000,000. One press supplies 3,600,000 copies of a religious paper for children; a thing not dreamed of in the beginning of this century.

How sublime then is this simple utterance of our Lord; which, while it contradicted the convictions of all the leaders of thought in his day, really contained in itself the great outline of history through eighteen of the most important centuries of the world's duration!

Turn your view back, for a moment, and listen to Jesus uttering this bold prophecy: then follow his little band of missionaries, soon including Paul, as they go forth to their heavenly enterprise; and see Judaism, Paganism, and every form of Satanic power giving way before the simple utterance of Jesus' Gospel. Come down to the opening of the fourth century, and see Constantine bowing the knee to Jesus. In less than half a century see heathenism generally renounced by educated people; so that those who adhered to their superstitions were then first called Pagans, by way of reproach; the epithet being equivalent to boor.

Follow now the path of the adventurous colonists who came across the Atlantic to found new States in this new hemisphere, bringing with them still only this

\* British Bible Society.  
Church Mission Society.

Wesleyan Mission Society.  
Gospel Propagation Society.

grain of mustard seed. To the eye of worldly wisdom how feeble the band, how unpromising the enterprise ! And when the first spring comes to relax the rigor and diminish the horrors of their position, how questionable even their continuance here ! But lo ! this tree is now spread from the uninhabitable circle of the north to the extreme south, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. And an earnest zeal in Britain and America is propagating the same system to the ends of the earth. See, for example, that solitary missionary band going to the South Sea islands, toward the close of the eighteenth century. They are feeble in their missionary spirit, as also in less important things. Scarcely one of them has faith to hold out to the end. And yet from them probably shone forth the light which soon gave to the Sandwich Islands the conviction that their gods and their religion were but vanity. This prepared the way for the Gospel-missionary, who, led by the hand of him that uttered this parable, arrived there just in time to meet a people longing for the knowledge of the true religion.

Fellow disciples of Christ, we must then fully apprehend the feeble aspects of our cause. The past should never be forgotten. Present successes expose us to the danger of forgetting those darker dispensations through which the Church has passed. The tree is now rapidly growing, and spreading its branches even to the ends of the earth. California, the Pacific Isles, Australia and Africa, are lifting up their hands thankfully to God for the coming of his kingdom in their benighted regions. Every anniversary we attend shows us progress. And all this has come without much sacrifice, exertion, solicitude or prayer, on our part. Others



indeed have toiled, and we are entered into their labors. We do well to recall the times of ploughing the ground for this seed; the sowing in tears of those gloomy periods, the solitudes, the sacrifices and efforts of those who have gone before us. The Saviour presents to us indeed in the parable only the progress and ultimate prevalence of his Church; but he first watered the soil with his own blood. Prophets too, apostles, and martyrs, faithful men and women, from age to age, have contributed the blood that hath enriched this soil. We must not then shrink if the dispensation of sacrifice and suffering should not yet be past. Prayer, sacrifice and labor are ever the conditions of success. And we must remember with sympathy the laborers that are still called to suffer.

But the parable and the history which thus far illustrate its meaning and confirm its prophecy, also call us to exercise great confidence as to the ultimate success of our cause, even under the most discouraging circumstances. Always remember that the little grain has within it an indestructible life. Our "labor is not in vain in the Lord." It is only sense and a blinded understanding that behold weakness in this cause. It has the strength of an indestructible life; the power of perfect adaptedness to its end; the pledge of him who cannot deceive nor err, that it shall yet subdue the world to him. Its history confirms this prophecy. All the enemies now in the field have been conquered once and again. Every old nation, to-day Christian, was once pagan or papal. Ask the history of the change. You will find a vast variety in the details. But they generally agree in this: some feeble laborer or laborers

came, in the midst of great opposition and embarrassments, and sowed a precious seed, pungent enough to awaken resistance in the soil that should receive it, yet despicably small in the eye of wits and sages, and worldly-wise people. While some despised, some tried to crush it or cast it out. But it has grown to its present flourishing state and gigantic stature, despite of all their enmity. So shall be its future growth until its spreading branches fill the earth. You know the law of vegetation to which our Saviour once made reference; its powers of indefinite increase, infinite multiplication. Sow one little grain this year, it shall return you thirty or a hundred. Sow them next year, and you have nine hundred or ten thousand; the next year, eight hundred and ten thousand, or a hundred million. In a few years your grain field shall whiten the surface of this entire planet. Sow this seed, servants of God, in every heart, in every house, in every land, and wait with joyful expectation the result.





## PART IV.

### PERSONAL AND ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES OF ACCEPTING OR REJECTING THE OFFERS OF THE GOSPEL.

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#### § 1. RETRIBUTION.

*Lect.* XXV. The rich man and the beggar—Death terminates probation.

#### § 2. JUDGMENT, OR FINAL DISCRIMINATION.

*Lect.* XXVI. The Drag-net—The final discrimination.

#### § 3. REWARDS PROPORTIONED TO MERIT.

*Lect.* XXVII. The absence of the King—Rewards equitably distributed.

#### § 4. RUIN.

*Lect.* XXVIII. The Rich Fool—Grave miscalculations.

“ XXIX. The buried Talent—Neglect of Duty, and its consequences.

“ XXX. The Prince's Wedding—A soul unfit for heaven.

“ XXXI. The barren Fig-tree—A useless life ending in ruin.

“ XXXII. The Ten Virgins—Unprepared for death.





## LECTURE XXV.

### DIVES AND LAZARUS ; OR, DEATH, THE END OF PROBATION.

LUKE XVI. 19-31. “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table : moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom : the rich man also died, and was buried ; And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot ; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house : For I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

WHAT a contrast is here exhibited in the lives of two men ! One is described as having for the object of life,—self-indulgence. He was not vulgar, riotous,



vicious ; only godless, irreligious, selfish, prayerless, and worldly. The other had his hope in God and heaven. Dives (for so we agree to call him, after the Latins), had all the leisure which wealth could secure for an uninterrupted attention to the service of God and his soul's welfare ; all the opportunity it can furnish for pious labors. But he lived for himself and the world. Then their conditions are contrasted. The one is rich ; the other, poor. Then they are contrasted in their deaths. The one was buried ; doubtless elegantly, attended by many mourning friends. The other died. But his body is not mentioned here, as no one cared for it. Then their destinies are contrasted. This was the point of the story. The form of worldliness our Saviour was particularly reproofing on the occasion of describing these men, was covetousness. He therefore showed that money imposes responsibilities on its possessors, while it also furnishes them the means of self-indulgence. It is on the latter fact men are prone chiefly to dwell in their estimate of wealth ; on the former their Redeemer would fix their supreme attention. He further reminds us that money cannot be carried away ; so that wealth and poverty alike terminate with life. He also shows that men may pass from the two extremes of this life to the two opposite extremes of the next. Honors, possessions, enjoyments, may be exchanged for shame, poverty, and misery ; while also the latter may be exchanged for the former. Here the unseen world is unveiled ; and both conditions of human beings are shown to be extreme. Here we see the first becoming last, and the last first ; the highest taking the lowest place, and the lowest passing to the highest. We see, here, also, the man who was

prayerless on earth forced to pray in hell. And yet it is a strange specimen of prayer; made, not to God, but to a saint; and faring, as all other prayers to departed saints, little to the benefit of the petitioner. But the prominent feature of the parable is that of death, as the introduction to an eternal condition of blessedness or woe. Both these men die, as all others must. One is described as dying under the guardianship of angels, who carry his spirit directly to a state of repose and blessedness. Of the other, our attention is called to his burial, in order to see the vain pomp of a man's burial, whose soul may be in hell, while men are pronouncing a eulogy on his virtues. We are not informed whether they passed to a planet, or to open space. Our curiosity is never gratified as to the part of space where departed spirits are gathered after death; perhaps, because we cannot now comprehend the relations of disembodied spirits to space. The infinitely more important point is presented with the utmost clearness and fulness, that there are two perfectly contrasted states there. And the parable confirms the most solemn views any one can possibly take of death. It is here presented as an exchange of good for evil, and evil for good; as an accumulation of evil or of good.

Our attention is first called then to notice,

I. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE CHANGES DEATH PRODUCES.

We are taught here,

1. *That it is an exchange of conditions for both classes.* That is, the one exchanges all his evil for good; the other, all his good for evil. "Son, remem-



ber, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus, evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Let us begin with the rich man. You will recollect he is not punished for having been rich ; for, Abraham was exceeding rich ; nor is Lazarus saved because he was poor, or had suffered so much in this life. But the Saviour selected these two men from the two extremes of society, in order to show, both that the outward distinctions of the present life have no value in the future life, and that men may pass from the two extreme positions in society here, to the two extreme opposites of our eternal condition hereafter.

A certain rich man ! He is not named. To name him would have inflicted needless suffering on surviving friends. His name had once passed from mouth to mouth here with encomiums. It was the sign of all that delights worldly minds. But when death comes, the merciful Saviour forbears to mention it, while depicting his present condition. It is only a certain, a particular rich man. He lived and enjoyed life, just as individuals are doing now ; and probably he has ten thousand imitators this very day on earth.

He had a house. It is not described ; and therefore we are at liberty merely to imagine that it was comfortable, in the highest degree that the art of his day could make it, and it was elegant. No disagreeable sights, sounds or odors could invade its hallowed atmosphere. All was beauty and order ; every thing ministered to some want of the body or the mind. But, one day he was summoned to quit the premises. It was a rude summons ; yet no earthly power could rebuke or repel the intruder. "Thou fool, this night

shall thy soul be required of thee ; then whose shall " this elegant mansion be ! And he went away, leaving only his body to be buried. He went away. And our Saviour has told us, whither. Yet there is not a word about the geography or the architecture of his new residence. A few bold, awful strokes of the prophetic pencil sketch it on the canvas to our eye. It is a dreary abode ! Whoever built it had no reference to the cultivated taste of the tenant ; nor even to his comfort. It seems more like a dreary waste ; a wide wilderness, over which volcanic fires have passed, and in their track scorched every green thing and turned every lovely plant to ashes, leaving only scinders and scoriæ to blast the eye that looks upon them. And is this the exchange of dwellings a man may make at death ? So our Redeemer says.

He had raiments. They are briefly described. Purple was a costly color, being extracted from a shell-fish of the Mediterranean Sea ; each fish furnishing but one or two drops of the coloring liquid. It was at first a royal color ; and afterwards passed over equally to the use of the richer citizens. The fine linen, or byssus, was an exquisite linen ; probably as fine and soft as silk or cotton, and of purest white. It was the cloth of kings and priests. And the man who could afford daily to clothe himself in these materials, was among the wealthiest. How they graced his person, and added to whatever native beauty he possessed ! But there came one day a summons to take them all off, give up the key of his splendid wardrobe, and pass away, to be wrapped in a windingsheet of fire ! And is that the exchange ? So Jesus says.

He had a select society. Some were gay ; some



were learned ; some were elegant ; some were witty ; some were distinguished in art ; some in war, and some in the state. They kept him in perpetual forgetfulness of his infirmities, of his sins ; yes, and of his God and his destiny. Every thing was contrived to keep off certain unpleasant subjects, and certain rebellious questionings within. But he was called away from that society. Not one could save him ; not one could even offer a prayer to God for him ; he had taken care to keep the gloomy praying ones at a respectful distance. He went away. Perhaps the man that spoke at his magnificent funeral, and recounted his virtues and his generous deeds, painted a beautiful scene, representing him as moving among demigods ; sitting at yet more sumptuous feasts, clothed in yet richer garments, and enjoying yet profounder discussions and loftier eloquence and more brilliant wit than at his table here. But it was all a lie ; he was in hell, lifting his imploring eye for the beggar Lazarus to come ; not to condescend to speak to him, but just to touch his tongue with water. He saw a blessed company indeed. But he was not in it. It was afar off.

He had servants. They flew at his signal to fulfil his wishes ; yes, they anticipated almost every want. And he had come to feel that he really was made of some superior material, and that his wants were of very great consequence. Poor man ! he left all his servants, and went where there was none so poor as to do him reverence. He once had physicians who would ride through storm and burning heat to reach him and relieve him. He passed from that to thirst, and thirst ; where no one, not even Lazarus, would bring him one drop of water. He feasted sumptuously every day.

Land, air and seas ; fowl, fish, tame and wild beasts ; gardens and fields ; all ministered to his appetite. India and Africa, ships and camels ; all labored to lay on his table whatever was beautiful to the eye, delicious to the taste, or agreeable in perfume. But he died ; and that was the end of feasting. He lifted up his eyes to see what kind of an exchange he had made. He was thirsty. Where were the wines of Helbon and Lebanon ? If he called for them, there was none to answer. No, not one poor drop of water to cool a parched tongue ! This was an awful exchange of conditions.

He had riches. Now he owns nothing but his soul, with its memory of the past, its consciousness of guilt, and its prospect of misery !

He had honor. Now he is an outcast. He had, but he has not ; he has brought with him nothing but his selfishness ; and even the lost despise that.

To sum up his past history, he had the fulness of worldly enjoyment. He had reached the point to which so many are anxiously looking. But he reached it, only to plunge the deeper from it. "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments ; and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said : father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame." The word Christ here employs is one expressing the torture of the rack. See the elements of his misery then, in the exchange of all the good he once possessed for the opposite misery. There was an entire loss of every form of good in which he had delighted. He once thought a man must be miserable without



them. And he judged right, on one condition ; that the man chose to make them essential to his happiness ; for that is altogether in the imagination first, and then in the will. He had chosen them as his chief good ; and so they had become indispensable to his happiness. But now they are all removed. That is poverty, real poverty ; eternal, irremediable poverty ! “ Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I left ! ” All his senses had been avenues of delight. Now there is not an agreeable object for one of them. In place of all this is one incessant scorching heat and thirst.

Look at the picture, fellow-men. Deny it, if you think that best ; or, if that is too bold, turn away from the sight. But there it is. Christ lifts the curtain from one spot in that future world. If you desire to understand your prospects and your present duty, you may. And all I can do for you is, to stand and hold the curtain up. I do not make the scene, nor invent the description. My work is, to help you contemplate it.

Now there is a reverse. Lazarus also died, and made a great exchange. He was here without a house. By day he lay at the gate of the rich man’s house ; and by night, probably, his couch was not much more sumptuous than that of the friendly creatures that licked his sores. But now he dwells in a palace, a heavenly palace ; and as if among the most honored of Abraham’s children, sits next to him at the feast, and reclines, according to the Oriental custom, so as to rest his head on Abraham’s breast.

His raiment on earth was not purple, nor fine linen ; but rags and patches, and untended ulcers. These he left on earth when he heard the summons to come

home ; he went there, and took on him robes of light ; garments of beauty and immortality.

He was a solitary man on earth. Flatterers were not drawn around him. He could give no returns for favors, nor entertain those who desired intellectual enjoyment. Most of his hours were lonely. But now he is in the midst of an immense family ; welcomed as worthy and congenial ; respected, loved by the brightest, best, and happiest of God's rational creatures. That was an exchange indeed.

Here he had no servants to attend him. There the angels of God are gladly ministering to him for Jesus' sake. And he who could command the service of no physician here, there has the Lord himself to heal his wounds, his sorrows and his sins. Here he fed on scraps that remained after master and servants had satisfied themselves. There he partakes of the richest viands of heaven. Here he was despised ; there he is loved and honored. Here he had nothing ; there he is possessor of heaven's riches. Here he had no enjoyment of an earthly kind ; there the joys of heaven are his eternal inheritance. They spring from the infinite being, perfections, resources and goodness of the eternal God, and cannot fail. This was the exchange secured in the case of one that believed in God here on earth. But there is more than exchange ; there is also accumulation.

2. *Death produces an accumulation of good or evil.* In this world is the mixture of good and evil. There, is no mixture ; but one or the other reigns supreme. We have seen a part of the process ; that he who is to be miserable after death must lay aside whatever did



minister to his happiness or comfort here, and the other lay aside all his discomfort. But the Saviour shows us more ; there is in each case an accumulation of the evils the one has shunned, and of the good the other has sought.

One sought a separation from the godly and a union with the ungodly. And now it comes to him in its completeness. He sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, with an impassable gulf between them. And now the very brethren whose society was so dear to him on earth, he dreads to have come to join him where he is. But Lazarus sought a spiritual union with God and the good while on earth. And now he enjoys it to the full. Being in Abraham's bosom, means the tranquil enjoyment of his society and friendship, as Jesus is said to be in the bosom of the Father.

The rich man sought bodily comfort. And now this appetite is increased, and an intensity is given to that form of desire which, when ungratified, is like flames of fire and the most scorching thirst. But Lazarus sought spiritual joy, and his cup is now full of it.

The rich man dreaded exposure to suffering ; and now the floodgates are opened upon him. There is no escape. The seal of eternity is on every form of evil he is enduring, and gives him up a prey to despair. But Lazarus sought mainly an assurance against sin. And now the assurance is complete ; and the last painful anxiety is banished from his soul for ever !

Let us now occupy a few moments in looking reverently at,

II. THE REASONS FOR THIS ARRANGEMENT, SO FAR AS GOD MAY HAVE MADE THEM KNOWN TO US.

We have two inquiries to make in contemplating the scene thus brought before us. The first is :

1. *Why at the commencement is the path of death eternal strewn with flowers, and that of life planted with thorns?* I do not now inquire why there are two paths leading respectively to life and death. That takes hold on deeper principles than we should now attempt to examine. But I would simply suggest principles which are true and righteous in reference to beings that have never sinned ; much more in the case of the fallen.

Goodness of heart and obedience in action are the highest good to which creatures can attain. But character is not a thing created ; it is voluntary principle, tried and confirmed by resistance to evil. Ask yourself, then, what is the test of principle but present pain connected with duty, and present gratification connected with doing wrong ? Abraham says to the rich man : “Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things ; and likewise Lazarus, evil.” The rich man chose the good of this life as his portion. He turned away from the claims of religion, because they came with self-abasing and self-denying, at the very outset. He therefore selected that form of character which places self-indulgence before duty ; and shuns the right, because it has a thorny portal at the beginning of the journey. Probation then requires that we shall choose between the right, and the agreeable ; the wrong, and the disagreeable. Wealth is a defence against many inconveniences, and gratifies many of our natural desires ; pleasure is an immediate gratification of our senses or



tastes. Human esteem is designed to satisfy a particular want of our nature ; so that worldly persons have a real good. There are unquestionably flowers in the opening of their path. And they are not deceived in supposing that the path to heaven goes by the narrow gate, the narrow way, and the cross. Probation, from its very nature, must require of us the sacrifice of a pleasure for a duty ; a present for a future, a temporary for an eternal good. It must furnish us opportunity to be good in heart, and to act it out under temptations to the contrary ; or, to be neglectful of our duty, with inducements to be neglectful of it. That answers the inquiry,—why, at their commencement here the path of life is planted with thorns, and the path of death, with flowers ?

The other inquiry suggested is :

2. *Why the pursuit of present enjoyment must lead to such tremendous consequences ?* I ask this question because there is so great an amount of wicked doubting ; both, whether it is so, and whether God is not to be blamed if it is so. You say it is tremendous to have such retribution possible. It is ; but not the less true. It is involved in the very grandeur of that nature God has given us. But you see these principles pervading the human constitution and human life. All permanent enjoyment depends on goodness ; and all goodness requires the sacrifice of temporary enjoyment. And again, all enjoyment must be temporary that is not founded on goodness. And all sin consists in making duty yield to present gratification. And the very nature of sin is to terminate in perfect misery. You can see it clearly even in this life in regard to some sins. But it is equally true of all. You may analyze

the sin of drunkenness, and you will find it involving all these principles. But the sin of unbelief, worldliness, rejecting or neglecting the Gospel, involves precisely the same moral elements. He drinks what pleases his taste, regardless of his duty. All worldly people do the same in other forms. He ultimately loses that gratification, with every other good. He begins his hell here, and cries out—"I thirst, I thirst; O for one drop of water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." But he only begins it a little earlier than you. Your neglect of Christ is the same in its nature, and involves the same eternal consequences.

Then, *there is prevalent a grossly false estimate of death.* Men look at it as an accident, an intruder, an inconvenient mar-plot. No, it is one of life's greatest realities; about which there should be the most earnest thought, and the most careful preparation. We think much of growing to manhood when we are young; of entering into business; of being married; of going to a distant country. But greater than all of them is dying; whether prepared or unprepared. If prepared, we exchange all evil for good, and accumulate all good to perfection. If unprepared, death is an awaking from a delusive dream. It is a laying aside the stage dress of an actor, and coming to the realities of life. You may play the king here, and leave your royal robes when death comes to strip you, and be found the beggar there. You may be a child of Abraham, and yet sink to that abyss. "Son," he said. What a dreadful title it was! reminding him of what he ought to have been, what privileges he had enjoyed and despised, what opportunities he had lost for ever. You may pass



from all life's banquet, to want for ever so much as one poor drop of water.

Then, *unbelief is the great sin*. God offers to deliver men from sin and its consequences ; not, however, against their will, nor without it. But men cling to sin. They are so in love with present ease and enjoyment that they will not seriously look at the future ; or, if they must, they contrive to make retribution seem unreal or unreasonable. This man had contrived to shut out from his mind the belief in the stern reality of perdition. He was not a spendthrift, nor luxurious, nor unkind, but ungodly. He took his good here. And he had evidently persuaded himself that if there was such a termination to a life of worldliness, it was not sufficiently demonstrated. So, when he came to feel the kindlings of those quenchless fires, he thought, I surely never would have come here if I had believed it was real. Moses' words were proclaimed to me ; but I did not hear and repent. So he concluded that if Lazarus were sent to his unbelieving brothers, they would believe him, and repent. Just as if there had not been witnesses competent and sufficient ; just as if there were not now ; and witnesses from the invisible world, of whom Christ is the chief, the Amen, the faithful and true witness ; just as if a Lazarus had not arisen from the dead, without producing that effect. No, you have Moses and the prophets, Jesus and the apostles. If you do not believe them, your case is hopeless, your prospects are fearful.

*The choice of life or death eternal is now to be made anew.* “Behold, I set before you life and death.”

There is the rich man's hell, and Lazarus's heaven. Choose ye, this day, which shall be yours. You have chosen present gratification thus far; that was the choice Dives made. You have rejected a crucified Saviour and his self-denying service. If you insist still that that is the way to eternal life, I must leave you with God and his word. But even for you, and for all another opportunity is given to turn from the path of perdition, and enter on the way of life. They that will "be blessed with faithful Abraham," must believe as he did.



## LECTURE XXVI.

### THE DRAG-NET; OR, THE FINAL DISCRIMINATION.

MATT. XIII. 47-50.—“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

WE are now entering on the most solemn aspect of truth presented by these parables of the Great Preacher. Here he shows us, under the emblem of fishing with a drag-net, in the hauling, and the subsequent culling, and severing the bad from the good, one great aspect of the Gospel. The fishermen draw, at an entire uncertainty, as to the kinds of fish they shall enclose. The bad fish are such as are unfit for the fisherman's use. Among the Jews, it was determined by divine law, concerning fishes, that “all that have not fins and scales, are an abomination.” So the Gospel is employed with great inequality, as well as uncertainty of results. Masses of men are reached by it; all are affected by it; some of them dragged to the very threshold of heaven, and yet not made by it actually “fit for

the Master's use." And, in the day of culling and separation, they will be cast away. Many are almost converted, but not quite. Many are even brought into the Church, who never are regenerated, and will not be saved. But the fisherman has two seasons ; first, that of hauling ; then, that of separating.

I select, as the culminating point of this parable, its exhibition of the

*Epoch of discrimination and separation in the kingdom of God.* Here all is prophetic, stretching its vision into the eternal state, and introducing us to the vast domain of the unseen and inexperienced future. Either God has met and gratified that intense desire in man, to know the future, or, he has not. Either he has brought by anticipation, the light of the ultimate consequences of our actions to shine upon, and affect our present course of life, or, he has not. If he has, we must hear and believe, and regulate our conduct by it. We shall expect to see lights beaming from every quarter of the heavens to confirm what our Creator has said, if he has spoken. But every sane man must acknowledge his own inability to anticipate his destiny with confidence, unless God has directly taught us. He has taught us. And the Scriptures reveal the certainty of a day of discrimination, or judgment ; the grounds of that discrimination, and the finality of it.

This parable then shows ;

#### I. THE CERTAINTY OF A DAY OF FINAL JUDGMENT.

It is to be a new dispensation. The present is characterized by indiscriminate efforts to draw men into the kingdom of God. That will be characterized by discriminating, separating, and treating in directly oppo-



site ways, the good and the bad. Here, the Gospel is preached alike to all. Here, the bad as well as the good, are brought into the Church. But this parable brings to our view the closing of the world's history. In this world a time is given for the tares to be sown with the wheat. They have time too to grow, unmolested. But, at length, a day of discrimination and separation comes. Then they are distinguished by competent judges ; separated from the wheat, and destroyed ; while the wheat is gathered into the granary. In this life a time is given for the fisherman to draw his net through the dark waters ; sweeping in uncertainty, and bringing many fish to land, that are to be of no value to him.

This, then, is the final judgment.

1. *We find it taught throughout the Scriptures.* Jude declares that this truth was proclaimed by "Enoch, the seventh from Adam." And as Adam lived about three hundred years after Enoch's birth, we may suppose that Enoch preached this doctrine in the hearing of the whole of the antediluvian world, until within less than a century of Noah's birth. With the immense longevity of that period it required but two preachers to reach the entire people of the world, between the Creation and the Deluge. But Jude informs us of the subject of his preaching, which was this : "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints (or angels), to execute judgment upon all that are ungodly." There the process of judging and discriminating are passed by, and only that of destruction is presented. But the definiteness of the period is shown in the term so constantly employed : "The coming of the Lord." Sometimes we find passages de-

scribing only the process of discrimination between saints and sinners ; sometimes passages combining these two ; and others describing the process of destruction. To select specimens of these. In Daniel it is said, (xii. 2,) “ Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Here are discrimination, separation, destruction, and salvation, all presented. Discrimination of the two classes is presented in such passages as this : “ We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every man may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Separation of the two is thus affirmed : “ Let both (the wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest ; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers : Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them ; but gather the wheat into my barn. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory ; and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats.” Salvation and destruction consequent upon this discrimination and separation are described in this same passage, as it closes : “ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.” It is also most solemnly presented in that passage : “ The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power.”



Then to confirm our faith in this revelation, let us look in another direction ; to

2. *The whole analogy of human life.* The doctrine of final judgment, including ultimate discrimination, separation, salvation, and destruction, is not a strange principle, found only in a few texts of the Bible, and the creeds of morose men. It is a doctrine of God, written on the whole constitution of man and society. We find it in the actions of man towards man every day. But in the dealings of God we find it carried out on the broad scale of national conduct and national destiny.

To look to this process of judgment carried on by man, let us enter our criminal courts. Here is a rigid performance of the whole process ; and every noble instinct of man, his higher sentiments, his reason, all call on him to carry the process through most rigidly. Then go to the school-house ; the class is called to judgment. The law is ; the lesson must be known. Discrimination takes place between those who have obeyed, and those who have disobeyed that law. Then a separation, of some kind, takes place. Then come, in some form, rewards and punishments. Pass to social life. A number of strangers are introduced to you or your family, in the course of the year. You and your family sit in judgment ; you discriminate, separate, honor, or reject every one so tried. Go to the mechanic's shop, and you will see it carried out ; every apprentice, every workman passes through a process of judgment. Apply to the school committee for a teacher's place. Ask for employment as a servant. Go to the medical college for a degree ; to the court for an attorney's license ; and you will find every where men go

through some process of judgment. Ask the ship-owner if he puts any man that falls into his hand, in command of his ships; if he has not tried men, and found them wanting; and said: "Depart, so far as I am concerned, to disgrace and poverty. I cannot commit these important interests to your care." Yes, and it is wonderful to observe how perfectly inwrought that principle is in the human constitution. Every human being has judged some other person, and assigned to him a kind of heaven or hell. I mean not, of course, to say that the process is either carried on generally with any formality, or that there is a rigid decision in each case. That depends upon mental habits; and our conscious ignorance of each other's motives, holds our decisions somewhat in check. But you take some great historical character, and see how intensely men will carry on the process of judgment, until they can form some definite opinion. Mary, Queen of Scots, died more than two centuries ago. Men are sitting in judgment on her character to-day; not willing to rest, until she has her place assigned her among the good or the bad. Oliver Cromwell, and William Penn are going through the same ordeal. How is it then men can say: the doctrine of final judgment is a human invention? Which part is a human invention; the process of discrimination, that of separation, or that of retribution? Surely neither; for they are all interwoven with the structure of the human soul, and the framework of society. And God is carrying on the same in the great processes of his government toward nations. I cannot now follow it out; but simply suggest to any that desire to do it, to ascertain concerning every people, since the diffusion of the Gospel among the nations,



what treatment the Gospel has received at their hands ; and then, how God has treated them. Let him begin with the Jews, and end with the Spanards or Italians. There is still another confirmation of this principle.

3. *It belongs to every known religion in some form, and to some extent.* I know but one that denies it, and one that evades it ; and both of those are enfeebled perversions of Christianity. All other religions, however false on other points, in some form, present two classes of men in the future, and assign to them two different and opposite conditions.

But the point of inquiry next in importance to that of certainty, is this ;

## II. WHAT ARE THE GROUNDS OF THIS DISCRIMINATION ?

Where will the lines be drawn, and by what standard will men be tried ? Who are represented by the bad fishes, and who by the good ? I will bring one declaration from the lips of our Saviour, and show how the various statements of Scripture agree with that. “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not, shall be damned.” Mankind have lived under two distinct revelations, that of law, and that of grace.

1. *Those who have had only the law will, be judged by the absolute principles of law.* “As many as have sinned without law (the written law) shall also perish without law ; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.” Speaking, in the same connection, of the peoples who lived outside of the circle of a written revelation, Paul says ; they “show the work of the law (or, what the law requires) written in

their hearts ; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile (or, alternately) accusing or excusing." The great inquiry will be for them ; have they known, loved, and obeyed God according to the light they had ?

2. *But, to those who had the Gospel, the Gospel will be the text.* And it was of such alone that the Saviour was speaking in this parable ; for, the net is that kingdom of heaven, which he brought on earth ; the system of redemption. "He that believeth, and is baptized (or confesseth me), shall be saved." But why are not we to be tried by law ? Because that trial has been had already. "He that believeth not, is condemned already." It is already settled that no man can be saved by the deeds of law ; "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But, it is asked, Are we not to be tried for the deeds done in the body ? We are. But the point which those deeds will go to establish, is this ; did we receive or reject an offered Saviour and salvation ? For instance, Paul was a persecutor ; and his horrid deeds in Jerusalem could be brought to condemn him. But Paul will not be found among the castaways, although absolute law would condemn him. He believed in Christ ; he accepted forgiveness. He welcomed Christ here as a Saviour, that he might not meet him hereafter as a condemning judge. The law will be the standard in that day, to all who here refuse to be delivered from its curse. Every impenitent person says, every time the Gospel is presented to him : "No, I refuse to accept deliverance from the law, I choose to be tried by it." And he shall be tried by it. And his actions and motives will form the ground of his trial. But they that are saved.



here represented by the good fish, they will be saved, not by absolute law; for, they all were sinners; but by grace. No dream is more idle than that of some who imagine that they shall be among the blessed in that day, because they have never sinned. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."

The ultimate division of the human race into two classes can never be the issue of a mere balancing of merits. Tried by an absolute standard of perfection from the beginning of our moral existence, we must all be in one class; we are sinners, transgressors of law. Some know their sins, and are self-condemned; others are self-complacent, and so prove themselves filled with the pollution of pride. The real inquest of the judgment is on this point: has the remedy for sin been accepted? The reason why faith in Christ is declared by him to be the turning-point, is simply because that includes two elements; the soul in its volition separating itself from sin so far as a creature can; thus proving its sincerity; and, the soul receiving Christ, and entering into a vital union with him, in order to partake of his life.

And you can see in Christ's description of the final judgment, in the 25th chapter of Matthew, how the discriminating line will be drawn. He there says nothing about the number or kind of sins any one may have committed. Mark that, ye that contrast yourselves with great sinners, and think ye shall be saved by that contrast. Christ draws no such line. Mark another thing. He brings up no eminent deeds of human goodness to justify his approbation of the saved. When he says to those on his left hand: "Depart, ye cursed," it is all based on simple negatives. It is not what they

did do, but what they did not do. And all that they did not do, was, they did not care enough for him to stand by him, or his cause, or his people, when self-interest could not be promoted by it. Why did they not feed him when hungry, or go to him in prison? Because they did not love him as their Saviour. They were satisfied with their sins; they feared not the curse of the law, and they had no heart-faith; so, no love toward Christ. These are the bad fishes. Then, when he describes the ground of the sentence, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom," what is it? does he speak of cathedrals built; vast intellectual labors; martyrdoms? No; but the simplest, every-day tests of attachment to the Saviour.

If any inquire then: how the law is to be vindicated by making that the test in the great day of trial; there is a plain reply. This is the only way to save the law and man too. If a human being is saved on any other ground, the law is sacrificed; because none have obeyed it. If repentance were not a condition, then the enemies of the law would be saved. If faith were not, then Christ's work of magnifying the law is rejected; and so the law is dishonored.

The parable conveys one other principle;

### III. THIS SEPARATION WILL BE COMPLETE AND FINAL.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net which was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore." "When it was full." That is significant. With the fisherman that is the period for ceasing to drag, and to begin to cull, or to separate. "They drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."



That surely is the final process of catching and culling, with those fish. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." Gathering and casting away, at the end of the world, is the great point of this solemn parable.

Then the temporary staging on which redemption was to be enacted, will be removed, that the eternal principles of absolute law may again move on, uninterrupted, and unobscured. "We look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This world must be destroyed by fire, because sin has so thoroughly penetrated it, and it has been so long employed in the service of Satan. "The heavens and the earth which now are, are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." The day of the Lord is coming: "in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth, also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." That, brethren, is the end. Fire is represented as the great agent, because it is so discriminating, so complete, so final in its process. It annihilates nothing; but it separates the impure from the pure, however intimately connected. It is one of God's mighty instruments and agents in nature. And hence even angels are compared to it. "He maketh his angels spirits, his ministers, a flame of fire." Whatever is purified by the blood and spirit and word of Christ, will pass through that fire, completely purified. Whatever is out of him, will be, by it, separated from the holy for ever. It is the end of the world; not merely of this physical struc-

ture and astronomical arrangement, but also of this probationary state. Law will be held back no longer from its execution, by the Gospel. It is the end of the world.

This parable contains both encouragements and warnings.

*It encourages all who are laboring to do good to their fellow-men.* He that believes in his heart that our Lord spoke the truth in this parable, is seriously affected at its description of man's destiny. What a day will that be, when I and my neighbor shall feel the hand of some mighty angel either leading or forcing us to the presence of the God-man judge; placing one of us on the right, and the other on his left hand! Day of discrimination; day of awful judgment; day of separation; day of destiny and doom! Day of salvation and damnation! No man, I say, believes in his heart that Jesus spoke truly in this and kindred parables, without feeling a deep solicitude, first for himself. And when his own fears are removed; then he feels for his fellow-man. Not to feel solicitude, with such a belief, is not only unchristian, but inhuman. And yet as soon as he begins to try to prepare others for that day, he finds it a most discouraging work. They have no sympathy with his solicitude. That is chilling. They either resist, or give a heartless assent. Some Christians get relief from the pain of this, by forgetting the day of discrimination, separation, and doom. That is wrong. And yet one could be driven to melancholy who should permanently fix his eye on one unconverted soul, and anticipate his destiny. Yes, the mere contemplation of any one sin, say of murder, or fraud, if viewed apart from every other consideration, would drive the



soul to madness. Now we want to find a medium ; neither to be distracted and disordered by contemplating the judgment-day ; nor to be relieved by forgetting it ; which is the ordinary way. The remedy is here ; our work is before us ; to continue casting the net without culling ; to know that it is our privilege to cast it ; to know that it is the indispensable means of getting the good to shore ; to know that it does not make the bad, bad ; to remember how prophets toiled, with failures ; how Christ and his apostles labored, without visible results. Our commission is—"to every creature." This tract, that Bible, these sermons, that religious instruction may be lost on individuals. But we must cast the net, and leave the gathering to angels. This prayer may not bring salvation to that person ; still we must pray without ceasing. It is enough for us to know that our blessed Lord put forth several parables, to show that he fully anticipated the failure of many good efforts ; and yet in the end, he shall be satisfied. But while this parable thus encourages faithful labor, it also appeals fearfully and powerfully to several classes ;

*To the inhabitants of Christian countries.* The net is around you. And if you remain unchanged, it will draw you to the shore, only as bad fishes, to be separated from the good, and cast away.

*To the members of the Christian family.* The net is around you. Your privileges are great. But privileges are not piety. You must repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or your destiny is, to be separated from believers, and cast away.

*To persons nominally believers.* Your profession of

piety is, being within the net. But the day of discrimination and separation is coming.

*To persons having religious convictions, and feelings not ripening into repentance or faith.* Those very convictions and feelings may deceive you, by appearing to be good. Those convictions and feelings must ripen into action, or the Lord will not own you. “Inasmuch as ye *did* it,” is his reason for approving. “Inasmuch as ye *did it not*,” is his reason for condemning.

The day of discrimination, separation, and retribution is hastening. Death determines its character to each of us. We know but little of the mighty angels of God now. But we shall see them then; they will go up and down as the executioners of God’s decrees. Their sympathies are with God and justice. They will not shrink from binding the tares in bundles, or, severing the tares from the wheat, and casting them into the furnace.



## LECTURE XXVII.

### THE ABSENT KING ; OR, REWARDS PROPORTIONED TO MERIT.

LUKE XIX. 11-27. “And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant : because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin : For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man : thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow : Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury ? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given ; and

from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me."

A TRUTH in words may be a false proposition in him who holds or utters it. The royal character of the Messiah was fully believed by every Jew. Their prophets had so abundantly exhibited it, that none of them doubted in regard to it. And yet the majority of them were just as far from the true idea of their King as if they had wholly denied every prophetic declaration concerning him; which shows how men may hold to an error, and fortify it by passages of Scripture. Every demonstration of supernatural power in the Lord Jesus Christ called forth the expectation in the hearts of some Jews that he was just about to set up his victorious throne in Jerusalem. It was on one of these occasions that he pronounced this parable; "because," it is said, "he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." To correct that notion, as they held it, he showed them that he had yet to go away to the court above, before completing his triumphs. And instead of entering at once into the joys of victory and the honors of conquerors, his servants had to stay in the field of labor and conflict, and wait in the faithful discharge of duty for the return of their Lord.

The simile he here employs was very familiar to his hearers, and very impressive. Judea having become a province of the Roman empire, was governed by Jews as viceroys. Every king or tetrarch of Judea must therefore be recognized by the emperor. Archelaus, Herod and Agrippa, all went from Palestine to Rome to procure from Tiberius and the other emperors the



vice-regal power. So the Son of Mary has gone to the imperial court to receive a kingdom. And he has here left on record a statement of what he expects us to do in his absence, and of what we may expect of him on his return. Our attention is then called to,

### I. THE KING'S ABSENCE.

The first feature of it particularly brought to view, in relation to this subject is, that,

1. *We are left in possession of his property.* The parable shows this by the sums respectively given to the stewards. And this principle is much insisted on in the Scriptures. We are responsible for the use of every faculty. Our tongue is our own in some respects ; and yet we shall find, one day, that men are to give an account to another for every "idle word" they utter, and for all "their hard speeches." Nothing is more common than for us to regard ourselves as completely owners of our time, property, speech, and other faculties and possessions. But we ought thoroughly to discriminate here. In regard to our fellow-men we are owners ; in regard to God we are borrowers, or stewards. He made our faculties ; he is the source of our possessions. They are his before they are ours. And every honest person earnestly seeks to know concerning any trust, just what his rights are ; how far, he inquires, has the owner invested me with ownership ; to what extent may I use these treasures for my purposes ; to what extent must I use them for his. And not only has God an ownership, but he alone is competent to determine the proper use of them, and guide to the ends worthy of our noble endowments.

Then property, the power of accumulating it ; speech

and the power of writing, and all forms of social influence are intrusted to us by another. He has gone away to get a kingdom which he will establish on earth. In his absence we are left in charge. Each steward has his own department, over which his control is absolute. Other stewards may counsel him, none can dictate to him; none can require him to abandon his occupancy that they may enter in. The Master's word is: "Occupy till I come." Only, they must be careful to remember that they can never write over the door of any room in their house, "no admittance to the master." It is often proper to put up such a notice in reference to our fellow stewards. But the Lord is owner everywhere, and of all; and has a right to come in at any hour, inspect every thing, and pronounce judgment; to reprove, rebuke, encourage, counsel, or expel us. These servants held their possessions for the master's use and benefit. So do we. It will not be inquired at last—how much provision did you make to outlive your neighbors, or to attract their attention to you; or, how highly did you estimate your own comfort. The latter is a legitimate object of regard; and we have instincts which will generally insure a sufficient degree of attention to that. But the Master will inquire what we did for him, his cause, his people, his poor. "I was sick, I was hungry, I was in prison; I, my people, my cause, my poor; what did you do for me with your money, your time, your talents, your tongue, your pen, your influence?"

Another fact then to be noticed concerning our position while the Lord is absent, is, that,

2. *His absence and our stewardship are temporary.* Christ has never forsaken his kingdom on the earth.



His main business abroad concerns that kingdom. The men who were most enlightened by the Spirit of God, had the most sublime and the most cheering anticipations of the Lord's return to take possession of his kingdom here. All the intervening time seemed to them short, and of little value ; except as it furnished opportunity to prepare the world for his kingdom, and men to meet him in peace.

“The time is short,” says one. So that this life has constant reference to another. Enjoyment, or what is called success here, is not the great end to be pursued. Responsibility to the Lord characterizes chiefly our present state. He is the owner of all we call our own ; and in his service it must be employed. The actions of this life must please him ; they are to be such in motive and spirit as his judgment approves. The actions of this life have the most important consequences in the next. And we are constantly either transacting the Lord's affairs, or neglecting them ; trading for him, or burying his money. A Christless life is another betrayal of trust ; a wasting of our Lord's possessions. So that it is as much a question of honesty as of piety, whether we will serve Christ, or live for our own worldly interests.

This is the view of our present life presented in the parable. It likewise describes,

## II. THE LORD'S RETURN TO HIS EARTHLY KINGDOM, WITH ITS MOMENTOUS CONSEQUENCES TO MEN.

It will be characterized by

1. *Manifestations of his royal authority.* “And it came to pass, when he was returned, having received the kingdom,” is the description in the parable. Else-

where in the Scriptures it is given with great fulness and grandeur.

When he arose from the earth "he ascended on high far above all principalities and powers, and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high." And between his departure and return there is a short but momentous suspense, in which the earth is to go through the most important period of its history. But every thing is at length to be changed; "the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. The Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." The early predictions announce his coming to sit upon the throne of his father David. He is anointed king upon the holy hill of Zion. To him every knee is to bow, and every tongue to confess. "Having received the kingdom," he says of the prince in the parable; under which image he represented himself. He now reigns inwardly in the hearts of a few who bow to his sceptre. But he is not acknowledged in all pagandom, in all Mohammedan territories, by the Jews, by the majority of men in Christian nations. His laws do not govern society. Men do not require of one another allegiance to him. They are not controlled by his will in the use of time, property, talents, or influence. And this state of things is allowed to exist, until he return. Then there is to be an entire change; probation ends, and retribution begins. The servants are to be called to account. All unbelief about his person, about our responsibility to him, will then cease. Every eye shall



see him. It will then be vision, and not faith. He and his supremacy or kingly authority will then be fully recognized and acknowledged. There will be none to question it, none to contend against it. Then Christ will no more be preached in sermons, and represented in sacraments, for cold unbelief to say: "Where is the promise of his coming?" Then it will no longer be a wonder that believers used to live in reference to his authority, and to anticipate his coming, as the greatest future event in the world's history. The reasonableness, the wisdom of it, all will then see.

The next feature of his appearing, as described in the parable, will be

2. *The rewarding of his faithful servants.* "Then he commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him: well, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him; be thou also over five cities."

The remarkable facts here presented to our view are these: fidelity to Christ in this life will meet his approbation and reward when he comes to take his kingdom; the rewards will be proportioned to a certain scale of merit; they will, in every case, immeasurably transcend all merit; and dominion under the Lord, or something equivalent to it, will be the reward.

Here arise two important inquiries. The first is this: how does rewarding of fidelity accord with the

constant representation of Scripture, that we are saved, not by works, but by grace?

There need be no difficulty in reconciling the two. And yet there is reason to believe that many persons, by a superficial view of this form of representation, which is so frequent in the Scriptures, make it inconsistent with the scriptural doctrine, that our salvation is all of grace, and in no degree of works or obedience to the law. The whole will be clear if we remember that our entrance into the kingdom of Christ really begins here on earth, and at a time when we have no merit, and deserve nothing but perdition; and just when we are acknowledging that solemn fact.

Let it then be distinctly noticed that our entrance into the kingdom of heaven is not by merit. We receive salvation the instant we take it, not as a reward, but as a gift. Look at the blessing which we then receive, in its particulars; there is pardon. That is the reward to Christ for his sacrifice. He purchased pardon with his blood. To him it is a payment; to us, a gift. It is not the reward of penitence. That is but doing the duty of the present moment; not cancelling the guilt of past neglects and past transgressions. It is not the reward of faith; for faith, in the very moment it is exercised, receives forgiveness as a gift, as something done for us in the time of our entire ill-desert. So that the blessings which we get by our faith, before we have performed any good works, and irrespective of them, are pardon, adoption, the Holy Spirit, regeneration, and heaven. That is the scriptural doctrine of salvation “by grace,” “through faith,” “without the deeds of the law.”

But what we do get by works, is the inward satis-



faction of doing right instead of wrong ; the satisfaction of bringing honor to Christ, of benefiting others ; and, at last, a special and discriminating acknowledgment of our good deeds by our Lord. And this is the fact brought to view in the parable. We are there shown not only that, under this system of gratuitous salvation, there will be a reward of good works, but also that the rewards will be proportioned to fidelity, skill and success ; for all these are here introduced. The steward who had gained twice as many pounds as the other who had the same capital, displayed (we may naturally suppose, other things being equal ; such as capacity and opportunity) twice as much of fidelity and skill, as he certainly did of success. Not that the mere amount of visible success will always turn the scale, for we see that the poor widow's two mites were placed above the rich contributions by him that knows the heart, because this displayed greater fidelity and zeal than any other offering ; and fidelity and zeal in a good cause are worth more than mere results.

The other inquiry we started was this : is there not here an appeal to ambition, or the love of power and dominion ? No ; probably that is wholly figurative. Mr. Trench quotes from a writer who tells of a slave thus rewarded, as if it were not uncommon in Eastern countries, even in modern times. A servant of the Sultan Zangi having given proofs of prudence and dexterity in the public business, the Sultan exclaimed : " It is fit to give such a man as this command over a city." And at once he made him governor of Kurish, and sent him thither. We are not then obliged to understand any thing more than rewards suited to a being perfected in holiness ; which rewards bear to the con-

duct and success rewarded, the same proportion as governorship over a great city to a few pounds of money. And yet it may be that the Lord is here preparing beings for vast spheres of glory, usefulness and blessedness hereafter, in which the two prominent elements are,—zeal and fidelity in his service.

Of all the actions of this life to be rewarded, of course those will be highest which sprung from the highest motives. And of all the motives of human action, the desire to be faithful to God is supreme. Therefore, amid the rewards distributed in the day of the King's return, the highest will be given to those servants of Christ who most constantly and most singly used their powers to promote his glory, advance his kingdom, or do his will. Selfishness, worldliness, pride, covetousness, ambition, indolence, will all appear infinitely evil, while loving Christ and laboring to honor him will appear the summit of human excellence and glory. Many of the modes of expressing love to Christ are, in themselves, so small, that the righteous are represented as saying, "Lord, when saw we thee a hungered, or naked? Then shall he say to them: inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the *least* of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

The next feature of retribution here represented as attending the Lord's coming, is,

3. *The punishment of mere neglect and indolence.* It has been said by the Lord, "He that is not for me, is against me." Many think they are quite safe because they are not as bad as many others. If they are not as pious as a few, they are not as bad as the multitude. They never oppose religion, if they never promote it. They never speak against Christ, if they



never speak for him. They approve of prayer, if they never practise it. They like to see other people going to heaven, if they never take any very active steps to get there themselves. But here the Lord presents a representative of that whole class coming to the judgment. And what now does the Lord think of him and his course? He always thought pretty well of it himself; will the Lord confirm his opinion? Let us hear his sentence: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, reaping where I did not sow. Wherefore then gavest thou not my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with interest! And he said unto them that stood by; take from him the pound." This, as we know from another discourse of the Lord, is only part of his sentence; and that the least terrible. But that is dreadful enough. "Strip him of all his gifts and endowments, and opportunities of usefulness. I have neither confidence nor interest in him. He will never do any good in the universe while he and it endure. He has voluntarily renounced my holy service, the great social interests of my kingdom; now let him go forth unhonored, disregarded, solitary, unsympathizing, not cared for. For a period I lent him talents, gave him opportunities, and made known to him my will; but all has been in vain. He never would love me, nor submit to my sceptre, nor consecrate himself to my service. He lived in a town where there were many active servants of mine; but he never would join them, and aid them. His life was spent selfishly; and now he comes to the judgment unrolling a napkin; and, presenting the pound, tells me that there I have my own. Take it from him. He is

a barren fig-tree, which has disappointed all the owner's expectations, who now abandons it for ever." What a prospect for an intelligent being, from whom its Maker ceases to expect any good for ever! Native faculties remain; but powers and opportunities of serving God and benefiting men are taken away. And he shall see the man whom he once despised as inferior to him in talents and attainments, now entering into the possession of those very gifts.

Then there is another aspect of the great day of the Lord's return here presented.

4. *His enemies will be destroyed.* When the king was going away, his citizens, that hated him, sent a message after him, saying: "we will not have this man to reign over us." So when he returned, having received the kingdom, and when he had concluded the judgment of the stewards, he came to those who rejected his authority. His sentence on them was: "Those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

We believe that our Creator designed that in two important departments of our life, we should choose our own rulers; that is, in the Church and the State. But there are two other departments in which he chooses for us; the family and the moral kingdom of God. From him with whom is all power, dominion, and authority, the decree has gone forth,—“Behold, I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.”

Many who have heard the decree are determined to resist it; and, to test both the reality of the decree, and the authority of him who issued it. Some do it by



denying the authenticity of the royal proclamation. They say this is a forgery, and these are not the King's seals. Other's make light of it, and go their way ; one to his farm, another to his merchandise. But the language of all their hearts is the same : we do not like the rigid, holy requirements of Christ, and therefore he shall not reign over us. Now hear what the King will do at his coming. You set Christ down to be one like our modern Universalist, prisoner's friend, anti-capital-punishment philanthropists. But you and they never got that view from his own lips. He thus describes this feature of his second coming. "The day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." In one parable he twice presents this awful aspect of his coming. "When the King heard thereof, he was wroth ; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. Then said the King to the servants, bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "The Lord Jesus," it is announced, "shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of his power, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." And the same strain of description you will find carried on to the end of the New Testament, winding up in awful grandeur in John's closing visions. Now you may, in your wisdom, object and argue, and think that is not the way to preach a Gospel of mercy ; but that is the Lord's way of preaching, and it will certainly be his way of acting.

*Then merely negative goodness will not be rewarded.* By negative goodness I mean that which many a person recognizes in himself when he is reading an account of some very wicked action, or talking about some wicked person; he thanks God he never did so, and he is totally unlike that person. It is that view which one takes of himself, who says to himself, when he hears about the judgment and the wrath of God, and everlasting punishment, "well, I'm quite sure God will never treat me so for the few faults of my life." This reasoning includes two false principles, which this parable opposes. The one is, that a man may neglect all the claims of his Creator, disregard his requirements, defeat his intentions, and then escape punishment, because there are many other wicked things he did not do. The other false principle is, that after a man has spent his life in taking care of his own interests, then God must reward him with an eternity of blessedness for it. How strange is the self-flattery and self-delusion of sin; that it leads men to believe every thing in God's word which favors their self-love, and deny every thing that makes them uncomfortable in disobeying God!

This parable further teaches, that

*Merely selfish morality will not save any one.* Suppose you know one of these stewards, and he is dying. Do you speak of him thus: "What a good man; how upright in all his dealings; how scrupulous to keep his promises; how true and just he was! Well, he has gone to his rest?" Now, how do you know he has gone to his rest? You and I know he has gone to his account. And Christ here tells us what kind of inqui-



sition he will there undergo. As Christ is to be believed, from your account of this man, he has not gone to his rest at all. He is that servant who wrapped his pound in a napkin, and buried it. And you can learn from two parables what becomes of him. Why, you say, "what has he done; how can so blameless a life be censured by a holy Judge!" Just as you would blame an agent who lived at your expense, and was bound to your service, whom you had intrusted with fifty thousand dollars, to transact an important business for you during your absence in Europe; and when you return and ask for the results of his labors, he coolly tells you, "I have not done any harm with your money, I have not wasted it; here it all is, I have been attending to my own affairs; and supposing you were very good-natured, I did not trouble myself about your business, your wishes, or your orders!"

This parable shows, that

*Mere benevolence will not save any one.* We will suppose that this steward could add to his plea, and state: "I was very kind to the poor. And I knew you were kind, so I daily distributed garments and food to them. I set up young men in business; I gave money to found hospitals; I relieved the widow, and sheltered the orphan."—That is all very well; but suppose the Lord includes all these in his requirements, and then has a still higher use of his property which he requires of this steward. How then will his doing one good thing be an apology for neglecting another? Suppose you employ a physician to take care of your family in your absence. And on your return, your wife and one of your children are dead; dead from sheer neglect, and

all the physician's reply to your inquiries about it is : " I did indeed neglect them, but I gave a loaf of bread to a poor widow that lives near me." Would you accept the plea ; and, above all, if you had a heaven of eternal blessedness to give, would you give it to that physician as a reward for that loaf of bread to that poor widow ? And yet that is just about what irreligious philanthropists expect.

We see again from this parable,  
*The necessity of discriminating between salvation as a gift, and degrees of honor and blessedness as rewards to merit.* No one can understand the religion of Christ, until he has clearly made that distinction. Without it, he will make perpetual confusion and contradiction of the Scriptures. In one passage, *e. g.* he is told : " Eternal life is a gift, and the wages of the sinner, or the reward of man's merit, is death." And similar to this is the declaration : " By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." And yet in this parable, the faithful stewards are rewarded for their fidelity. And in the 25th chapter of Matthew, Christ represents himself as enumerating the deeds of charity his people had performed, before he pronounced the welcome : " Come ye blessed—inherit the kingdom." One passage relieves the whole subject : " The promises are in Christ." That is, if any sinner does not come to Christ by faith, all his good deeds fail to atone for one sin, or to purchase eternal life. If he comes to Christ, and acknowledges the greatness of his sin to be represented by the price of his redemption, then his sins are blotted out, alone for Christ's sake ; then his good deeds are re-



warded, in proportion to their goodness ; but altogether in Christ, and for Christ's sake.

*What a picture of the world does this parable present.* There are obscure persons, young and old, who are every day preparing for the brightest glories of heaven ; planting trees that shall for ever bear for them the golden fruit of Paradise. They are unknown by the world ; passed by ; discouraged. They are faithful in a little now ; they shall be rulers over much, hereafter. Then many of the mighty, the wealthy, the learned, the gay, are either spendthrifts, wasting the King's property ; or, burying it in a napkin. The last they will hear of all their possessions, will be, "Take it from him."

## LECTURE XXVIII.

### THE RICH FOOL; OR, GRAVE MISCALCULATIONS ABOUT WEALTH.

LUKE XII. 13-21.—“And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

It is the lot of some to live amid the signs of wealth, from infancy; and, of others, to enter suddenly upon the inheritance of large estates. Others, again, attain more gradually to wealth, by the regular advance of trade.

Probably few in either of these classes ever seriously propose to themselves this one important question: what would my Saviour say to me about it, if he were to address me? But if any should wish to know his



views, they can, because he has here spoken very distinctly in regard to confidence in riches.

He describes a substantial farmer who had reached the climax of prosperity ; his grounds having just produced so abundantly, that he found his existing accommodations insufficient. And as he retired ; perhaps one fine harvest evening, after seeing wagon following wagon, bearing home their precious burden, he poured out his soul ; not in thanksgiving to the bounteous provider ; nor in serious inquiries, whether there was any responsibility connected with all this ; but in this purely selfish, worldly, sensual soliloquy : “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits ? And he said, this will I do ; I will pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul : Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”

To perceive the Saviour’s motive in presenting this case, we may recall the occasion of it. It seems that one of the company whom he was seriously addressing in regard to their spiritual interests, proposed to him to interpose his authority, and compel his brother to divide their inherited estate with him. The man might have had justice on his side. And it might have been proper for him to appeal to an authorized tribunal to obtain his rights. But, in coming to Christ with such a case, he betrayed that very spirit which is ever at work, unfitting men for the service of God on earth, and for his glory in heaven. He could see nothing in the Teacher from heaven, the soul’s Redeemer, but a Judge of earthly rights ; and nothing in Christianity, but a code of worldly justice.

The Saviour's immediate answer to him is full of divine wisdom. It is but one sentence ; a brief appeal. But if that one sentence had been properly regarded by the leaders of the Church, the world would have been spared some of the darkest scenes in its history. "Man, who made me a judge, or a divider over you ? That sentence draws this clear, broad line ; the interests of this fleeting life, however powerfully affected by Christianity, are entirely separate from, as well as inferior to the spiritual interests of man. Christ, his ministers, and his Church have nothing to do with adjudicating, legislating, or controlling the former. Their whole work pertains to the latter.

After thus declining to interfere in a family-quarrel about property, the Saviour drew this strong portrait of a worldling ; exhibiting principally his fatal miscalculations concerning property which appear in this idolatrous soliloquy : "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." He was satisfied with possession, solely as the means of self-indulgence.

He would not see that wealth is not only an insufficient pledge of happiness, but may even be a source of immeasurable evil ; as it was, in fact, to himself.

His case furnishes us a warning, not to miscalculate in regard to the value of wealth ; not to satisfy the soul with it ; not to over-estimate either its intrinsic worth, or, the duration of our ownership.

These mistakes will now claim our attention. The first refers to

#### I. THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF MONEY.

That it has a real value, all admit. But, it has not



a supreme value. And placing wealth out of its true place,

1. *Degrades the soul.* I speak not now so much of the gradual process of degradation, as of one specific mental act; a practical decision of the mind; of one fearful step that is taken, whether it be the first or the thousandth time, when man, a complex being, accepts as his portion, that which can satisfy only the inferior faculties of his nature. This, of course, excludes the case of desiring money as an instrument of benevolence, or as a means of intellectual cultivation. The case before us is not either of these classes; for, this is the language it addresses to itself: "Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" in other words, "Glory to Providence, or to chance, no matter which; I am now able to make full provision for all the wants of my soul." And what are they? Ease, eating, drinking, merry-making. It is striking that he does not even select the highest forms of good which money confers. It certainly is nobler to delight in art, in beauty of form, color and sound; in architecture and sculpture, in painting and music; in travel and books, than in idleness, gluttony and mirth. And yet, while many ungodly men esteem money chiefly for these more refined fruits of it, they are really as far from satisfying the soul with all they do, as the grosser glutton. This we shall notice again, when we come to consider what is the true source of the soul's blessedness. But the parable leads us to remark on the folly of seeking the soul's good in these lower forms of enjoyment; ease, good living, and amusement. They all suit the body; but they degrade the soul, when they become important in its estimation. Respite from labor, seasonable

participation in the bounties of Providence, the cheerful laugh, the relaxing amusement are not hurtful. But the life of ease, pleasure and amusement, is the death of our nobler nature. Activity ; self-control ; high and holy purpose ; grand and disinterested, or kind, sympathizing emotions, are the true means of enjoyment to our spiritual nature. And a rich man or a poor man can be happy, only in proportion as he exercises these ; using his little or his greater means under the control of those powers. It is therefore a degradation to man's nobler nature to make the possession of wealth a supreme good.

But there was a still greater loss in this man's mode of regarding and using riches.

2. *It deprived his soul of God, its true portion.* Poor is the rich man, who has sold all his friends for gold ; how pitiable too is an orphan ; but what think you of a soul without God ? Jesus says, this man was of that class. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." What can that expression describe ? One that God regards as poor ; so that if our Maker should utter his judgment of him in an exclamation, it would be—"Poor, poor man !" It is one that has not faith. He trusts gold, but not God. It is one that has no love to God ; but, love only to gold. It is one that has no claim on God, for he has abandoned his Redeemer for gold. He is rich in gold ; so is the poor dull clod of the earth. He is rich in gold ; so is the carcass of the traveller that sank with his treasures to the deep caverns of the sea. He is rich ; but not toward God. And he is so great a fool, that in the midst of all his delusion and spiritual poverty, he is saying : "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for



many years." Abraham had God with worldly possessions ; this man had wealth without God.

There is still another radical error in regard to money. It respects,

## II. THE DURATION OF ITS OWNERSHIP.

This man did not seriously anticipate living here for ever ; yet, he practised on himself the common delusion, while admitting that he could not enjoy worldly good for more than a limited period, to make that period appear to cover the entire future. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." This was, virtually, saying to himself : "I am now satisfied ; my future is well provided for ; and all care may now be dismissed." So that, it is manifest,

1. *He overlooks the brevity and uncertain continuance of life.* Regarding the whole of his existence, virtually as if it were to be passed in this world, without the interruption of death, he considers wealth as the defence against all evil, and the guarantee of all good. In his view, possessing enough for the necessities of this brief period, should remove all anxiety about the interminable period beyond it. Every prosperous or rich man would avoid this fatal mistake, by saying seriously to himself : all these possessions are mine for only a short time ; they are to be taken away from me in a few years, at most ; and then I shall have wants which they could not supply, if I still were master of them. But the course of the most is, to admit in words, the transitoriness of their possessions ; and at the same time, to regard them as unalienable and immortal. You see in the practical deduction this man made from his prosperous condition, that he had found

in wealth the portion of his soul, and its resting-place. Having that, there was now nothing more to do, but to enjoy it. If he had toiled to acquire it, now he was to find repose. If he had denied himself many luxuries, from considerations of economy, now he was to take off all this restraint. If he had been sad in his poverty ; anxious, care-worn, now his trials were ended ; he had reached the only heaven he could understand, and he was to enjoy it. Had it been revealed to him that he was to live here for ever, in the enjoyment of wealth, it would have made no change in his plans ; for he in his heart did already regard the “many years,” which appeared to lie before him, as an eternity. This is the folly of the world. It does not belong to a man because he is rich ; but because he is ungodly. And the ungodly poor man would have the same sentiments, if his circumstances were changed. The possession of wealth is a real good. But holding it as an immortal possession, is great folly for him who is soon to have only an undisputed title and an undisturbed dwelling in a poor ditch of clay or sand. A wise man who is prosperous, looks to the end of his stewardship ; to the poverty and nakedness, the darkness and solitude of the prison his body is soon to inhabit ; and to the wants of his undying nature in that awful hour when it goes forth to a new life, a new world, and the judgment-seat of God. Wealth becomes a weight to drag the soul to perdition, and bind it there, when it hinders its possessor from aspiring to the riches and blessedness of heaven.

Men deceive themselves greatly in supposing they believe in their own mortality. Generally, a man is controlled by that which he really believes. This man did



not really and practically regard himself as mortal, when he resolved to pull down his barns and build greater. We ascertain this, not from his resolution ; for, that in itself, may be entirely proper ; but from the purpose for which he does it. It is not with him a prudential arrangement, properly to take care of what God has intrusted to him ; but a selfish provision for luxurious living for an indefinite period. And what we are now particularly remarking in the case, is, his entire overlooking the uncertainty of life. If the man had said : “ I must enlarge my granary, because this property is intrusted to me ; and I am accountable for the proper care and use of it, to him who owns both it and me,” he would have spoken with Christian wisdom. But, as it was, he spoke with the folly of ungodliness and unbelief. And see how fearfully his folly was demonstrated. He said to himself : “ Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease.” But God reversed all that sentence, and said : “ Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Instead of building, thou shalt be buried ; instead of luxurious living, thy soul shall go to render its account, and enter on its destiny. “ This night ;” instead of years, thou hast but minutes to live ; instead of keeping thy soul in subjection to the body, it shall be required of thee. In the Greek it is : “ They shall require thy soul of thee.” Who ? Strong executioners of the divine will ; messengers that take no denial ; death’s angels, that cannot be resisted. What a comment is this on the inspired saying : “ As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not, so he that gathereth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and, at his end, shall be a fool.”

Yet this folly is daily perpetrated in the world. And moreover, man, in this shortsightedness, overlooks another consequence of his mortality. It is that

2. *Riches accumulated and prized solely for their owner, must, at length, be transferred.* There may be a just reference to our families and others dependent on us, in increasing our property. It may be right to use it ourselves, and leave it for them when we die. That is not censured here. The evil exposed is, the exclusive or supreme reference to our own ease and indulgence. And the folly is partly seen in the pungent appeal; "Then, whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" It is not a case of prudent provision for heirs, that the Lord here holds up for a warning. It is rather the accumulating property, supremely or solely in reference to one's self, and without reference to its future owners. There may be pride and a selfish clinging to wealth, even in the case of one providing largely for the wealth of his heirs. That, however, is not brought to view in the parable. This man cared only for himself. He had not love enough to live in or for others, or to derive any part of his happiness from the anticipation of theirs. What a vanity then is it under the sun, for him who is totally indifferent to the prosperity of others, who can see no value in property excepting as it promotes his own gratification, to exult in the possession of property as if it were to be forever his, when it is so certainly to be transferred; and how soon he knows not, to other hands!

This parable is forcible; but not by the novelty or profoundness of its appeals. Its whole force lies in calling infatuated man to think on what lies right in his path; not to reason profoundly; but, to reflect on



his palpable mistakes, and rectify them while he may.

In view of this parable, the inquiry may very properly be started :

*For what purpose, then, is wealth bestowed?* And it may be a sufficiently full reply in this connection, to say : Among other ends, it is given as a test of character. It tests them that have it, and them who have it not ; the poor ; those growing rich ; the rich ; and those losing their possessions. It brings to light our relative estimate of time and eternity ; earth and heaven ; the soul and the body ; God and self. If we chiefly prize our lower enjoyments ; or, if we set time before eternity, and earth before heaven ; or, if we are indifferent to communion with God, and his approbation, then outward prosperity will be to us an occasion of supreme satisfaction. Then we shall feel our foundations strengthening, and our prospects brightening, just in proportion as our grounds, or our shops, or our ships, our pen, or our hands are bringing in an increase of fruits. We have here but one life ; and that is a probation-life. Just before us is the final judgment ; and, beyond that, endless destiny. In this brief day worldly prosperity meets us ; gold glitters at our feet ; its brilliant streams are running into our coffers. It comes for many purposes. But one of them is, to try what is in us, and what we intend to cherish in us. Our estimate of wealth, and the use we make of it, may determine for us, both the sentence of the last day, and our position in the future state. There is a fearful meaning concealed in the mysterious term our Redeemer uses : “ they shall require thy soul of thee.” “ Thou hadst a soul to be washed from the guilt of sin, to be renewed

in the image of God. That was life's great business. But thou hast betrayed that trust ; thou hast abandoned that soul for fleeting pleasures ; and now the patience of heaven is exhausted. The ministers of its justice will come this night and require of thee that sacred trust."

*The world is full of delusions.* All worldly, or God-neglecting persons deceive themselves. They are doing just what this man was doing ; and yet they see no wrong in their course, and no danger. They say to themselves : Can any thing be more noble than an upright merchant, any thing more honorable than an honest farmer ? is not commerce the artery of a nation's life-blood ? are not abundant harvests and prosperous voyages fruits of God's bounty ? And from the obvious answers they make to all these inquiries, they leap to the conclusion ; therefore, all is right with me. God is blessing me ; men have a growing respect for me ; and I have an increased satisfaction with my earthly lot ; Soul, take thine ease, thank God, and enjoy life. But this parable interposes an obstacle to this self-complacency, and utters its stern admonition. Pause, ere you settle down upon these conclusions. You are laboring under some capital misapprehensions. An upright merchant is a pillar in society ; an honest farmer or mechanic is a most respectable man ; wealth is a gift of God ; and yet it may be true that your views of property and your use of it may be entirely godless, selfish and ruinous. You refuse to look at your motives, and to compare them with God's requirements, and so remain under delusion. Christ condemns neither money, the acquisition or possession of it, the laws that regulate it, nor the adjudication of questions of



property. He simply exposes the worldling's false estimate of riches, and the tremendous consequences of his errors. He does not condemn prudence and forethought. But he does condemn a prudence that looks only to earthly enjoyment, to selfish indulgence, and to godless comfort. And nothing can be more dreary than the scene which his graphic words open on the imagination. "This night thy soul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?" Nothing is said about the hour, nor the way in which this dread requisition shall be made. "This night ;" in the hour of darkness and stillness thou shalt hear the rustling wing of the death-angel. With a voice piercing where no other voice ever reached, he shall say : "I am come for thy soul, in the name of the Eternal Judge." And it shall go forth, leaving the body ; the plate, the pictures and statues, the deeds and mortgages, the vaults stored with gold, the precious wines stored for a century to come. Perhaps the table that has groaned beneath the feast, and resounded with the merriment of thy companions, will be still standing as they left it. The soul shall go forth at that stern bidding. There he leaves it ; separated from all it loved ; cut off from the only source of its joys ; stripped of all its possessions ; blasted in all its hopes. Nothing is said of the body. And of the property it is simply said : Who takes it now ? Significant inquiry. It was all provided for one ; but his prudence is at fault, for another takes it. And the soul goes forth, godless, friendless, impoverished ! Perhaps one of those heirs will put a monument over the grave, and write his virtues on its face. But God has prepared his epitaph long beforehand : "Lo ! this is the

man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches." And Jesus, on another occasion, went still further, and told us how the soul of one of this class was situated. You may read it in the 16th chapter of this gospel. The only difference, if any, in the earthly history of the two men, was in the manner of acquiring their property. To the one we are introduced just in the process of acquisition. He became rich by the products of a farm. The other we find in the midst of possession. The one is described when laying out his plans of enjoyment; the other, in the midst of his pleasures. Of the one we only hear that he is sentenced to die in a few hours. The other we see dying, dead, buried, and in hell lifting up his eyes in torment and in hopeless prayer. He is reported to have done nothing very bad, in the world's estimation. He lived for himself, and to enjoy his wealth. This is the worst that is said of either. And yet, with these examples before their eyes, men tread in the same path, repeat the same experiment, and indulge the hope that all will be well with them. Once more then the finger of God points to these dreadful examples. Once more His voice repeats its warnings.

But men prospering and prospered inquire, if things be so,

*What are we to do?* First of all, put that inquiry honestly, earnestly. Then listen to your Creator, for he has abundantly answered you. First, he says: "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them." They have a certain value; but they are not your portion, your God, nor your Saviour. Now is the time to beware of plans which look to personal ease and indulgence. If the body is growing old, and the mind shar-



ing its infirmities, that is a sufficient reason for diminishing activity ; just as weariness is a reason for going to bed. But that is a very different thing from counting on the luxury of sleeping all the time, for the mere enjoyment of repose. It may be best for some to retire from the activities of business ; but it is best for no one to say : “Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merr-y.” But above all, determine to use your property so as to secure the highest ends of which it is capable. It may be used for the glory of God. You should inquire : how ? It may be used for the eternal good of your fellow-men. The channels are wide open, and many. It may be used to scatter the mists of poverty, to dry the tear, and cheer the heart of many a needy fellow-creature. Ambrose beautifully says : “Thou hast barns large enough already ; the bosoms of the needy, the houses of widows, the mouths of orphans.” It may be used for your own highest good ; not in any thing it can procure for you directly ; but in the returns it can make you hereafter. “Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, treasure in the heavens which faileth not.” We may sow gold here, and reap in eternity golden crops of joy. We may so use money here as to strengthen in us pure and noble principles and sentiments. And that is an expenditure which will bring in eternal dividends. We may so use property here, as to meet it in the currency of heaven multiplied a thousand fold. But let none here make the silly mistakes which even religious teachers have encouraged. And to guard against them, I need merely mention them to those who have God’s Word, and believe its teachings. No man can, by any expenditure of money, atone for one sin. No man can make any selfish use

of a part of his property right, by giving away another part for good purposes. No man can make any use of his money that will do him any good after death, unless he be a penitent believer in Christ, and his faithful servant.

This is a parable for the times. Wealth is rolling in floods, upon this land. America will probably become the richest country of the world. This will then be the danger to our people. Prosperity tries men's souls more terribly than the dark periods of adversity and poverty. Let the rich and poor man each say to himself to-day : "Soul, thou hast in Christ a glorious and eternal portion ; accept him to-day, serve him faithfully, and wait for his coming."



## LECTURE XXIX.

### THE TALENT UNIMPROVED ; OR, NEGLECTED DUTY, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

MATT. XXV. 14—31.—“ For *the kingdom of heaven is* as a man travelling into a far country, *who* called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one ; to every man according to his several ability ; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made *them* other five talents. And likewise he that *had received* two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents ; behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed : and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, *there* thou hast *that is* thine. His lord answered and said unto him, *Thou* wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed : thou mightest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and *then* at

my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give *it* unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance : but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory."

THE story of the Ten Virgins immediately precedes this, and aims to illustrate the need of a thorough heart-work in religion. This illustrates the need of a right course of outward action, that we may meet our Lord in peace. As a narrative, it exhibits to us an Asiatic master going from home, and intrusting his property to his servants. They were probably men of various capacities ; some, skilful artisans ; some, good farmers ; and others, having a faculty for trade. By the laws and customs of the country, he had the absolute control of them ; and the right to exact their services. He intrusted to them various sums, according to their various capacities. On his return he called them to render an account of their operations, and to give him the profits of their labor and skill. Two of them gave in their accounts with joy. They had been faithful and successful. They received not only approbation, but also very high rewards. And in this part it is evident the parable was not broad enough to cover the whole of the great reality it concealed. For, when our Lord comes to speak of the reward of the faithful, and the punishment of the unfaithful servants, he goes beyond the natural, and introduces the supernatural ; he drops the person of an earthly lord, and presents himself saying to his faithful servants in the last great day of trial : " Well done, thou good and faithful servant ;



thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." And so in the severity of punishment upon the unfaithful servant we see the same anticipation of the day of wrath.

And as we suppose the scope of this parable to be this, we shall confine our attention to the unfaithful servant.

I. HIS COURSE AND HIS PRINCIPLES ILLUSTRATE TWO CLASSES OF PERSONS.

The first is a class

1. *Who intend to be conscientious, but not religious.* He looked sternly at one aspect of his duty. He thought of dishonorable men who had abused their trust, and appropriated to their own uses property committed to their care ; or, squandered, where they should have invested it. But he was resolved not to imitate them. When the day of reckoning should come, he was going to appear confidently before his lord, and say : there, Lord, thou hast that is thine. And, for this purpose, as soon as it was intrusted to him, he carefully wrapped it up, and buried it in the earth. But his honesty was of a very scant pattern. His lord had claims on more than that sum of money. His right extended also to the value of that money, as capital ; and to all the skill, time, and labor of his servant to make it accumulate. Yet in his purpose to be honest, he overlooked all that claim, and thought it was very honest and honorable in him scrupulously to preserve and return the principal. This is the fatal mistake of every honorable, honest, high-minded man, who is not religious.

God made man capable of knowing, loving, and serving him. Religion is just as much what man was made for, as bearing fruit is the end for which a fruit tree was created. Serving God, communing with him, worshipping him, obeying him, laboring for man's recovery to God, praise and prayer, exerting our powers to spread the influence of religion, is just as much what man was made for, as shining is what the sun was made for. Only, the sun *must* shine; man *may* be irreligious if he will.

In order that man may love God, he has a heart; he has also an eye, an ear, and a thousand wants, all serving as channels by which the goodness of God comes before that heart. Now the man that purposes to be upright and conscientious in all his relations to man, and thinks that will answer his purpose when called to the great account, makes a radical mistake, which this parable is designed to correct. He ought to be conscientious and upright; and that is as much better than fraud and dishonesty as this man's burying the talent was better than squandering it would have been. But it will not meet the Lord's requirements. The heart is a talent; its capacity for loving God is a loan to be used according to the will of God. Then there are all the natural powers, by which the love of God in the heart would manifest itself, and so create and cherish the spirit of piety in other hearts. These ought to be so employed by each as to bring from other human beings a revenue of affection, homage, service and praise to God. Now the person who deliberately adopts the resolution to be moral, and not to be religious, is digging in the earth and hiding all this part of his Lord's money. He makes up his mind that he



is bound to be an honest man ; but not to be a religious man, or to exert a religious influence. It may be the duty of old men, and sick people and dying people to be religious ; but he has nothing to do with it, nor it with him. Ministers ought to be very pious, and try to make other people so. But on him there lies no such obligation. In not being religious he is neglecting no duty, disregarding no responsibility, violating no obligation. He is not blaspheming the great Being, nor opposing his will. And surely he can meet him and say : “ I have done no harm in the world, I have met my responsibilities ; and I must enter heaven.” Here is a most fatal, most culpable, and alas ! a most common delusion. The principle is false ; for he is a wicked and slothful servant, and buries his Lord’s money in the earth, who determines to be moral, but not religious. He takes complacency in the avoidance of one evil, but utterly overlooks the still greater evil of which he is guilty.

Another class is represented, and, perhaps, principally by this servant.

2. *They intend to be religious, but not benevolent.* Personal religion is God’s best gift. And when he bestows it, he bestows it for his own wise ends ; and he has left us no shade of an excuse for misapprehending those ends. Ye, says Christ to religious men, “ Ye are the light of the world.” But who gave them light ? “ God hath shined into their hearts to give them light.” But, to what end ? “ No man lighteth a candle to put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house.” The same truth is manifest when we regard the very nature of piety. It is not merely a passport to another and bet-

ter world than this, when we shall be dragged away from our idols in this world. It is a living principle, feeble in its beginnings, but definite in its nature. It is love to God, producing love to man. But love to man must be patterned after Christ's. His was a self-abasing, self-sacrificing, systematic, patient, persevering, intelligent, practical love. It absorbed his affections, guided his powers, employed his time, dictated his prayers and his sermons and conversations. Now, when any one purposes to be religious, but not to employ his faculties, time, wealth, and influence to make other men holy and happy, he makes a fearful miscalculation. His purpose to save himself, and save no one else, is a purpose not to do as badly as those who neglect their eternal interests. But it is at the same time, and equally, a purpose to appropriate all his powers to purely selfish ends, whether they be temporal or eternal. In carrying out this purpose then, his Lord's talent must be hid in the earth. He has perhaps a clear, penetrating spirit, admirably adapted to the study of religious truth, and a power to explain and make it clear to others. But so far as the Lord's end is concerned in the employment of that power, it is hidden in the earth. Oh, who that for a moment looks at the present condition of society among us, can fail to see that the greater portion of our Lord's property is now buried! And this man represents a very large class, because there is so little power yet put forth to promote true religion in the family, the social circle, the community and the world.

Now, we pass to notice,

## II. THE CONDEMNATION OF THIS SERVANT.

1. *His plea was not admitted.* It was the pillow on



which his conscience had always slumbered ; it was the theology of his creed ; it was the profoundest deduction of wisdom, in his view ; it was the sermon that he always preached to himself when conscience became unquiet. But when he came to the day of trial, it failed him. It satisfied his conscience, but did not satisfy his Judge. It lasted him long enough to prevent his doing his duty ; but it did not stand by him just when he most wanted it. And so his case furnishes a striking proof that a man may live and die with a lie in his right hand ; and that we have to adopt religious opinions, not to suit ourselves, but to satisfy our Judge. And the Lord Jesus Christ here designed to show that the tree will be judged by its fruits ; and if our principles have not led us to be religious or godly, and benevolent, we shall be condemned, and no admission be given to the pleas and reasonings that may have quieted our consciences here. But we have also,

2. *The reasons why his plea was rejected.* It was rebellious. It involved a purpose never to comply with his Lord's wishes and requirements ; for it was founded on a reason that will be as true and satisfactory to-morrow as to-day, and for ever. And so will every excuse, plea or reason given for not obeying God, be regarded. Can the Judge of heaven and earth admit the validity of a reason which makes rebellion against his authority right ? If any one makes any excuse or apology for not being religious or benevolent, he is not only declaring that he will for ever use his powers selfishly, but that it will for ever be right and reasonable that he should. This lord had the right to require his servants to employ their time and powers in making money for him. And in that he represents

our Maker, who has a right to require us to be godly and benevolent, and use all our faculties under the control of godliness and benevolence. And for us not only to refuse to do so, but also to offer reasons for this refusal, is confirmed rebellion ; and especially when those reasons implicate the character of God. “I knew thee, that thou art a hard man ; reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed.” This is absurd reasoning. But any moral wrong that tries to give a reason for itself, must make an absurd statement. Is he a hard man who employs other men at fair wages to sow in his fields, because he reaps where he had not sown ? Is he necessarily a hard man who employs his servants to winnow his grain, and then gathers where he has not scattered ? How many hard thoughts do men entertain of God, to justify themselves for not serving him ! But their pleas and reasonings will all be considered rebellious when they appear at his bar. Is God requiring of us what it is not our best interest to do ? Is he gratifying whims, or indulging prejudices, or selfishly regardless of us ; is he only requiring what will promote his own interests ? This is what all secretly think of him who do not obey him.

Many may not be able to shape the secret plea with which they vindicate themselves to their own consciences for not being actively religious. But it comes to this rebellious principle, be it what it may : I am not bound to serve God ; something releases me from the obligation.

But this plea is, moreover, rejected, because it is self-contradictory, and condemns the pleader. This servant admitted all facts in the case. The property was committed to him, with the expectation that he



would employ it in his master's service. And the master was rigid in exacting his dues. The man, in view of these facts, says : "and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." His lord said that his therefore was illogical. All these things are true, "therefore thou shouldst have put my money to the exchangers. If thou hadst such a fear of me that thou couldst not venture to trade with my money, then thou shouldst, at least, have committed it to the exchangers, who would have given the interest at least, if I must fail of the larger profits of trade."

The same pleas are heard now, at least in murmurs, if not in bold and open speech. "It is so difficult to be religious that I despair of it. It seems to me something so remote and intangible, so unattainable by me. I ought to love God ; but he seems to me such a cold, stern Being, that I cannot love him, nor cordially speak of him to others." Now what does God in fact demand of us ? Not that we shall never have sinned ; not that we shall come to Christ guiltless and perfect ; not that we shall omit working until we are perfect, but that we come to Christ as sinners, and because we are sinners, that we consecrate ourselves to the service of God just as we are ; that we work with a sincere intention, and with an humble reliance on Christ for aid and for acceptance. It is therefore a hallucination of our own wicked hearts, when we frame such a conception of God as makes us say, "I am afraid to begin to be religious, to try to be a Christian." But we see the end.

3. *This wicked servant was cast out.* First, he was dispossessed. "Take away the talent." Grace unemployed is like grain kept too long in the granary. It

rots, and wastes, and perishes there. It ought to be out in the great veins of circulation, scattered on the ploughed earth, or turned into bread. It is like water that ought to be circulating; running now in light, now in obscurity, cleansing, refreshing and blessing wherever it goes. But if kept too long stagnant, it corrupts and perishes. Augustine beautifully illustrates the principle that gifts increase by being imparted to others, and diminish by being withholden. He applies to it the story of the widow whose poverty the prophet relieved by a miracle. "The oil ceased the moment she ceased bringing new vessels to be filled with it." So, brethren, charity grows as long as it imparts. And so should we industriously seek for vessels into which to pour our oil; for, the more we pour the more we have. "Charity's vases are men." The process of taking away from the man that hath not that which he hath, and giving it him that hath, begins even in this life. The powers and opportunity of godliness and of charity are all to be taken away from the unprofitable servant. And he is to be cast into outer darkness, where are weeping and gnashing of teeth. That is the end of a godless, Christless, and selfish life. After being dispossessed, he was "cast into outer darkness."

*There is no true conviction of sin, no genuine repentance until we see the evil of a negative goodness. Multitudes are resting there, in the interval while the Lord is absent. And they will remain so, stupidly satisfied with their buried talent, because it is not squandered or spent in riotous living. This veil must be taken from their eyes if they are to mourn over sin and forsake it; and begin to be godly through begin-*



ning to believe in Christ. It is plain from the Sacred Scriptures that we all are sinners, and should all repent. But some very well disposed persons wonder why they cannot repent. If their sins are very great, they cannot see where nor why. And they never will, so long as they deny their obligations to be as religious as Paul, as benevolent as Christ. "What wrong have I ever done?" Turn that inquiry: "What right thing have I ever done?" Your talent is buried in the earth; that is your sin. God and man are losing all the profits it would bring if rightly employed. To-day he is looking for a tribute of childlike love from your heart; for penitential sorrow, for praise and thanksgiving. To-day Christ looks for some return of gratitude for his wondrous love and sacrifices, and the immeasurable blessings he has procured for you. And you have a heart full of affections; but it is buried. You are not as bad as you might be, or as some other persons; but you will be rejected, stripped of your powers and opportunities to be good and do good, and cast into outer darkness, unless you repent. "Of what have I to repent?" A godless, Christless, selfish, worldly life. You ought to have been a Christian long ago; fervent, advancing, useful. The light of a godly example, the power of religious instruction and persuasion, of private and social prayer, should all have been employed by you for the good of your family and your neighbors. But your Lord's talent is buried in the earth. If you cannot see this, then you cannot repent; and you must go on voluntarily blindfolded, until the light of that dread interview make the truth manifest to you. Thousands ought this day to be weeping, who are self-complacent; thousands of our Master's servants

ought to be seen busily engaged digging up their buried talents, and availing themselves of the little space still left for repentance and its fruits. Thousands have, as it were, written their apology or plea, and sealed it for the judgment. They should, this very day, break open those seals, and re-examine those pleas in the light of this parable. "What is my reason for not being godly and Christlike; why am I not a decided and earnest Christian? Why are not my powers all employed to promote godliness in myself and others?" To this inquiry there is an answer. If that answer satisfies your conscience, you are deceived. If not, it will not satisfy your Judge; nor yourself, when the illusions of time have ceased. There is no good reason; there can be none. Therefore it is unreasonable and wicked. You ought to be trading with your Lord's money; and if you cannot, then you ought, at least, to put it out to the exchangers.

This portion of the parable has also a reference to a class of true Christians, and utters its instructions and warnings to them.

*Members of the Church are here cautioned against an evil to which they are exposed.* Their powers are paralyzed by fear. Some are driven to monasteries by it. They would serve God in this world if they could. But he exacts of them more than they with their infirmities can render, surrounded by the temptations of the world. Therefore they must retreat and bury many of their powers in a holy retirement. Many a young man shrinks from serving his Lord in the ministry; many a father refuses to pray with his family; many a member of the church refuses to engage in active exer-



tions to promote religion. And their reasons are all summed up in this : “I was afraid, and went and hid thy money.” To all these persons many things may be admitted. It is true that you are not worthy of God’s favor ; that he has not given you as many talents as to some others ; that without his grace you can do nothing. But then it must be added : you are required to do only what is adapted to the faculties he has imparted ; that his grace is sufficient for you ; and thus that grace can be had for asking. Brethren, be not deceived ; if we are neglecting any duty, or shrinking from any post of usefulness to which our Master is calling us, it is but a mock humility that refuses to go ; there is in our fear a mixture of selfishness and unbelief, which is very offensive to God. “I feared thee, because thou art a hard master.” What language for us to employ, even in our hearts, to Christ ? How many are made powerless in the Church by this false humility ! It makes her an army composed mostly of crippled soldiers. One has bandaged his eye ; another has wrapped his arm in a sling ; another has put his feet in soft coverings lest they should be injured by the rough places of the battle-field. Where are the active, enterprising traders who are joyfully looking for their Master’s return, when they may say, “Here Lord, thy five talents have gained five more ; thy two talents have gained two ?” Where are the soldiers all equipped, and encamped, ready to do battle for their absent King ? Alas ! the cowards and compromisers, how they have reduced the efficient strength of the army.

Brethren, let us be reminded, the Lord is coming !

## LECTURE XXX.

### THE WEDDING OF THE PRINCE ; OR, A SOUL UNFIT FOR HEAVEN.

MATT. XXII. 1-14. " And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden ; Behold I have prepared my dinner : my oxen and *my* fatlings *are* killed, and all things *are* ready : come unto the marriage. But they made light of *it*, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise : And the remnant took his servants, and entreated *them* spitefully, and slew *them*. But when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth : and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment ; And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment ? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

THIS parable shows both the gentleness and severity of our Saviour. Its main scope we have already considered, as it is embodied in two others. I therefore



propose to notice here only the last member of it, the case of the guest not clothed in an appropriate garment ; while the many reject these offers of mercy and provisions of grace, of those who appear to accept them, here and there one fails of eternal life.

The eternal God has provided a banquet for our race. It is a festival for the soul ; the company it assembles is the élite of the empire ; the conversation of the guests is the most exalting, enlightening, and refreshing ; the board is spread with all that can gratify the spiritual appetite of man, and invigorate his spiritual affections and powers. To that feast the bounteous provider invites men, all men ; nay, urges them to come. Nothing can be more free and cordial. But there is a twofold perversion of this fact. Some get the impression that the King is so good-natured and easy, he will not be very much offended if they should slight his invitation. Others regard it as a matter of no great difficulty to take a seat at that table, and suitably to occupy it.

To guard against this latter misapprehension particularly, the history of the guest not suitably attired was introduced into the parable. It is probable that the Saviour here made allusion to a custom which, in part, still exists in Oriental countries ; that of the kings providing splendid robes as presents for their guests. Chardin relates a case much in point. He not only states that the king of Persia expends an incredible sum for sumptuous garments as presents to his guests ; but also mentions the case of a vizier to whom the king had sent a rich garment. An enemy of the vizier changed the robe for a plain one. This the vizier took as a proof of his sovereign's displeasure, and refused

accordingly to appear in the streets in it. His wearing another robe than that the king gave him cost him his life. We find in the Scripture history many instances of rulers presenting beautiful garments. Joseph gave changes of raiment to all his brethren. Jonathan gave his robes to David. Ahasuerus gave Mordecai garments of fine linen and purple, a great crown of gold, and royal apparel of blue and white. So the father of the Prodigal Son is described by the Saviour as commanding the best robes to be put upon him. The garment for great wedding occasions was a long white robe, variously and richly ornamented.

When the guests had all entered the banqueting-hall, and taken their places, the royal entertainer came in to see them and share their happiness. But his eye at once fell upon one who dishonored the occasion and the host, by an unsuitable dress. No people are more rigid in their etiquette than the inhabitants of Asia. Want of compliance with established modes of expressing respect is, in their view, among the greatest of crimes. The king approached the man, and appealed to him for an explanation of his appearing there in an unsuitable dress. "Friend" is a more ambiguous term in English than *ἑταῖρος* in Greek. Our word "Sir" is nearer to it. "Sir, what dost thou here without a wedding garment?" When Cicero the great Roman lawyer is censuring Vatinius, he lays much stress on his having appeared at a great and solemn festival, clothed in black. "Whoever, even in a time of domestic grief," he demands, "appeared at a supper, thus arrayed in black!" Imagine, then, an Oriental royal feast, and all the guests seated in a sumptuous hall; each one having over his own dress a splendid



robe, which the king had furnished; each thus acknowledging the king's kindness; receiving it, and wearing it as a token of his own regard for the king; and thus gratifying the king's taste by giving the whole scene just such an appearance as he desires. But there is one exception. One man has come there in a different mood. What it is we are not informed; whether he wished to exhibit his own dress, or to insult others for being dependent on the king for their dresses; or, if it were mere negligence and indifference to the host's wishes, we are not told. But, whatever the reason was, when challenged by the king, he was confounded; for, the enormity of his conduct then flashed upon him. It was not only an act of personal insult to a royal personage, but also a proclamation of rebellion against his sovereign. Immediately the case is treated so. The diakonoi (not the douloi, or house-servants, who carried out the invitations to the feast) are commanded to seize him, bind him hand and foot, so that there could be neither resistance nor escape; and cast him out of the king's presence, out of the happy circle, out of the brilliant scene into darkness, outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Here are serious instructions from the lips of our gracious Redeemer and teacher. What do we find represented in this part of the parable? As one has vigorously described it, here is the solemn inspection, the unanswerable challenge, and the awful excommunication. We look, first, at

#### I. THE FALSE HOPE INDULGED.

It matters not whether the person be in the church or out of it; whoever indulges the hope that he will

enter upon the blessedness of heaven at death, or after death, is here represented as sitting at the King's feast. Whoever has a well founded hope is represented by the suitably clad guests. Whoever has an unfounded hope, is represented by the man without a wedding garment. What is then the present difference between the two? Both expect to receive the King's favor. One has accepted the provisions of grace; the other has not. We are informed that at the marriage supper of the Lamb the guests sit in white linen robes; and that linen is righteousness. But it is righteousness, not native or natural; not inherent nor purchased. It is a gift; a gift of royal munificence. Whoever has not received it, and put it on himself, is an unwelcome guest. No guest is reproached for having lived in poverty, or the company of plain people. No one is censured for coming in to the royal presence from the hut of poverty or the cabin on the highway. It is not inquired whether you were bad or good before you entered; for the servants had orders to go into the highways, and gather together as many as they found, bad and good. That is just what distinguishes this royal banquet from all others.

The Gospel describes two kinds of righteousness as belonging to those it calls saints. They are not only distinguished by the two terms, justification and sanctification, but whole sections of the New Testament are founded upon the difference. The most striking instance is in the Epistle to the Romans. The first five chapters are occupied with discussing the first form of righteousness; showing that no man possesses it naturally. The sixth, seventh and eighth chapters discuss the second form of righteousness, or sanctification. The



Bible insists on the two as indispensable to man's salvation. It declares that the one cannot exist without the other. And yet it insists that justification precedes sanctification; in other words, that a man must be forgiven and reconciled to God before he can begin to be radically renewed. The man without the wedding garment then represents the person who professes or believes that he is reconciled to God, who has not God's righteousness.

Their hope may then be designated,

1. *A self-righteous hope.* "He that believeth shall be saved. He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." But what must we believe about Christ, and how believe in him? We must believe about him, that "He who knew no sin was made sin, or, a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." That, however, is not belief *in* him, though essential to it. The demons believe as much as that. But believing in Christ is called putting on Christ; being in him as the branch is in the vine, and the limb in the body. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Believing in Christ is coming to him in our sins and guilt, having no plea nor price; condemned, helpless, undone. This is called "buying wine and milk, without money and without price." This is what is meant by the poor and miserable, and blind, and naked, buying of Christ fine gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and anointing salve for the eyes. This is the poor, and halt, and maimed coming in from the hedges and highways to the King's feast, to be clothed and adorned from his wardrobe, and feasted at his expense. All who thus come are thrice welcome. Christ "came not to call

the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He came "to seek and to save that which is lost."

Here the pride of man revolts. Many see that they must be religious. All desire their own welfare here and hereafter. But they are unwilling to see themselves to be detestable in God's sight, condemned by his holy law, and utterly ruined. That is the stone of stumbling and rock of offence, probably with the greater portion of those who hear the Gospel. The pride of the heart, which does not keep them from being sinners, makes them averse to knowing that they are such. And there is a fear also of discovering our hopeless condition, because the soul must be overwhelmed with despair to see that, and yet not see that Christ saves the lost. I am afraid that the majority who reflect seriously on religion, stumble there; and especially in a community where this radical feature of the Gospel is abandoned, opposed, hated, caricatured and vilified. Many, many are at the King's feast in a raiment of righteousness brought from their own wardrobe; nay, woven on their own loom. They are upright, honorable, kind, intelligent; but they are not clothed in the King's garment. They believe about Christ, but they do not believe in him. They expect to be saved, because they are sanctified. With them justification is founded on sanctification. They are pardoned because they are good; whereas in the kingdom of God it is just the reverse. The whole argument of the sixth, seventh and eighth chapters of Romans, is to establish the fact that there is no real sanctification that does not begin in justification. We are first forgiven for Christ's sake; we first wash our robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb; and



then we feel the power of his cross to sanctify our hearts. We are not forgiven because we are not guilty, or because our guilt is light. On the contrary, where sin abounds grace superabounds. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. The Ethiopian eunuch believed Christ and in Christ, and was then baptized. A man may be in the Church and not be in Christ. He has never gone out of himself, as regards the exercise of his confidence ; out of his own goodness and competency to meet the claims of God's law. He has never built on this Rock of Ages. A man, he thinks, may be very sure that God will never cast off one of so blameless a life as he leads ; and yet God must cast him off or falsify the Gospel, annihilate the cross of Christ and redemption, and destroy the foundation of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, saints, and the whole Church.

Justification is through a righteousness not our own. Our own righteousness comes from strict, perfect, and uninterrupted obedience to law. But God has declared that no man is justified by the deeds of the law. Then every one makes him a liar, who believes any of these popular notions, and repeats this cant of unbelief: "Will God send so amiable and upright a person as A or B to hell? will God damn me for ever for the few faults I commit in this short life! I have never done any thing very bad."

All who say and feel these sentiments refuse the King's garment, and yet they go to the feast. They hope to be saved by justice, not by grace ; because it would be unjust in God to cast them into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Besides this self-righteous hope, there is also,

2. *An impenitent hope.* Some men are impenitent, because they sin against their consciences ; and some, because they have brought their consciences over to their sins. Sin and holiness are respectively the deepest elements of our being ; and therefore can be understood fully only by the profoundest knowledge, both of what we are and what we ought to be. Some sins lie out on the surface of character and the life. And whoever is sinning wilfully, while hoping for salvation, is at the King's table without the wedding garment. In such cases it is not difficult to produce conviction, and destroy the delusive hope. But multitudes sit comfortably at that feast, waiting the King's entrance, who have not on the robe of sanctification. They have never begun to put off sin as sin. They have corrected their evil tempers, conformed themselves to a worldly morality, which is Godless, Christless, and selfish. But they have never begun to love God, and to love their neighbor. Such persons have never been truly convicted of sin, of the radical defect of their whole character. They have no right conceptions of the holiness of God. They have no skill to detect the subtle workings of pride. Hence they never repent of their heart-sins, and they never feel their need of a Redeemer, nor come to him, to be crucified with him to sin in all its forms.

To contemplate the multitudes who hear the Gospel with respect, and yet remain strangers to the first steps of salvation, is most painful, and makes the believer exclaim, "Lord, open thou their eyes, that they may see." If the process of a radical sanctification of the heart is not begun here, we shall never become holy. We may sit at the King's table until he comes in.



But then he will say, "Friend, what doest thou here?" And when he comes, then you will be speechless. Now you have many things to say for yourself; then you will be struck dumb.

Let us look at this terrible sight.

## II. THE SOUL STRIPPED OF ITS HOPE AND ITS PRETENSIONS.

1. Here is *the dumbness of true conviction*. In this world men generally walk in dense spiritual darkness. Judgment slumbers, and therefore conscience sleeps. The being, character, and law of God are kept out of sight. This is permitted, because we are in probation. But the King is soon coming; every thing proclaims it. We are to see him, and to be inspected by him. He will look at us, to see how we are dressed for the marriage feast. And in that presence, and under that flaming eye conscience must fully awake. Our Judge will look for righteousness; both imputed and personal, he says. And if we have them not conscience will know it, and there will be no reply to that dread appeal, "How camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?" There the magnitude of sin will be seen, because all false standards are removed. You have there to deal with God. There the sin of impenitence and unbelief will be seen to be very heinous. A poor peasant is invited from the highways to become the King's guest; only being required to put on a garment which the King furnishes. But instead of that the clownish peasant rushes rudely in, in his vile garments, to take his place at the royal banquet!—Presumptuous hope! No excuse will then be offered; for, it will then be seen that the wedding garment

might have been procured ; ought to have been. Grace and salvation, were once within reach ; to be had for asking ; to be had by accepting ! But the wretched soul preferred to life itself the name of living. Nothing can be more voluntary than this insincere life of impenitence while hoping for heaven. Sin was preferred to holiness, while the excellence of holiness was acknowledged. The world was preferred to Christ, under a full conviction that Christ is infinitely more to be desired than all other good. Appearances have been set above realities ; shadows above substance ; the name of piety above piety ; the hope of heaven above a fitness for it. There will then be no avoiding the blame of self-deception and self-destruction. Salvation was offered sincerely. The wedding-garment might have been procured ; it was offered, urged upon him. Then the insincerity of all excuses and pleas will be manifest. The fashionableness of impenitence will then appear but the more dreadful. “ Yes,” must each self-condemned soul exclaim, “ I had light enough, opportunities, motives sufficient.”

This speechlessness will also, in part, be occasioned by,

2. *Amazement.* The insincere professor, and the person carelessly indulging a hope of heaven, will see that after all their religious labors and their confident expectations, they are not prepared for heaven. Each one hoped that Christ would answer for him ; but he has never believed *in* Christ. He hoped that the Spirit would sanctify him. But he has steadily resisted and quenched the Spirit. He thought heaven was sure if he remained a consistent professor or a respectable person. But now he finds there is not an element of



heaven in his soul. It is a life which he has never aimed to secure or cultivate. He remains still selfish and ungodly.

He has not the wedding-garment, and now he knows it. What can he say? Well may he be speechless. He hoped in God's mercy; but mercy cannot annihilate justice. And now he is to be treated as he treated God and others. He refused God's call; now God will refuse his. He took care of himself alone; and now God will abandon him to himself. He was indifferent to God's glory; and now God will be so to his. This is, moreover,

3. *The dumbness of awe and terror.* He has now, for the first time since he received his rational existence from his Maker, really met him. He had heard much by the hearing of the ear; but now he meets his Judge, face to face! It is related of a shepherd boy, that as he lay on a bright summer day on the hillside, surveying the sea in its calm beauty, he was enchanted, and resolved to sell his flock, and give himself up to a life on that glorious element. But when he was fairly out in the mid-ocean, he saw too late that he reasoned erroneously from the present to the future. The calm was exchanged for the terrors and perils of the storm. But what mean these changing moods of the sea? Like all else in nature, to instruct and impress the human heart. Why sleeps its infinite power, rocking like the heaving breast of slumbering infancy? Because it is a symbol of God. "Then I kept silence," he says; "and thou thoughtest I was altogether like thyself." Now he is silent as the sea in its calmness. But when he arises to the judgment, then shall he gird himself with power and terrible majesty. As of old, the mountains will

tremble at his appearing, and the earth quake “for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.” Before him burns devouring fire ; lightnings leap upon his path ; and flaming cherubs guard his throne. The heavens and the earth flee away affrighted ; and death and hell unbar their dreadful gates.

Then the day of false pleading and self-deception is past. We shall then have to do with the King. This will be so unlike dealing simply with his written word, his ambassadors, or our own consciences, that nothing we have ever known, can give us any right apprehensions of it. A life of insincerity, of compromise with conscience will appear detestable ; yea, fearful, in his presence. It is the overawing presence of Infinite Majesty ; the majesty of Virtue, Truth, Age, Power, Wisdom, Rectitude, and Authority. And this will be seen not merely in Deity, but in the manhood around which the ranks of heaven fall prostrate. What an appeal in that day—“Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment !”

This speechlessness expresses also,

4. *Despair*. The King is indignant, who shall reconcile him ? “How camest thou in hither ?” The only reply is : by having a contempt alike for thy holiness, thy veracity and thy mercy. Not an attribute in God, not a creature in the universe will plead for that man.

*The first duty of every one is, to determine what is a suitable preparation for heaven.* Many contradictory opinions are held on this point, of which, of course, but one is true. Many teachers instruct men ; but we have only one Master. Each must determine for himself. Settle these points with a profound and prayerful ex-



amination of the Word of God. Am I lost, in my present character and relations to God? Is it absolute and endless ruin that awaits me? Can I be saved without forgiveness? Am I to be forgiven on repentance alone, or must faith and repentance go together? Is there any, and a vital difference, between believing about Christ, and in him?

*Sincere ignorance will save no one.* It does not, in the ordinary providence of God. The man who took a poisonous dose, sincerely believing it was a salutary medicine, found his sincerity insufficient to save him. We have no right to be ignorant on this momentous subject. God has warned and guarded us on this point, sufficiently to remove all apology. Perhaps every one of us has time enough, this day, to rectify all mistakes. And if you spend its hours in trifling thoughts, and reading or speaking vain things, instead of an earnest and prayerful investigation of this great matter, this day may be sufficient to condemn you. The remembrance of it alone may make you speechless before the King.

*Now is the time of self-scrutiny.* The King delays his coming. Yet he is coming; and he will allow no guest without the wedding garment to remain in his presence.

Am I a rejecter of the invitation? Have I accepted the invitation from heaven? Have I justification before God; is sanctification begun in my heart?

## LECTURE XXXI.

### THE BARREN FIG-TREE; OR, A USELESS LIFE ENDING IN DESTRUCTION.

LUKE XIII. 6-9.—“He spake also this parable; A certain *man* had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, *well*: and if not, *then* after that thou shalt cut it down.”

WHEN some persons reported to Jesus the melancholy story of the Galileans whom Pilate had slain at the foot of their altar, he appears to have discovered in them the marks of a self-complacent spirit; and, to reprove them, he gave this history of the fig-tree. And the peculiar force of this reproof is found in its pointing out a distinction which all are prone to overlook; but which the Jews signally failed to regard. Had they looked upon natural endowments, national blessings, and high religious privileges as increasing their responsibility to obey God, and to become holy, they would have used their blessings as the bountiful Giver wished them to be employed. But instead of that, they considered their outward advantages as themselves con-



stituting their claim on God's favor. And so far did they carry this spirit, that if the providence of God removed their neighbors by a sudden death, but spared them, they regarded it as an indication of God's special approbation; even though they might be living in entire disregard of his design in sparing them. How appropriate to them, and to many in our day, is the history of this fig-tree!

As referring to the Jews, it is full of appalling interest. They were a fig-tree which God owned, and planted in his vineyard. He had looked to them for the fruits of righteousness. Under varying and successive dispensations he had come seeking fruit; but in vain. There was none. Then, when his justice called for their extinction, his mercy still pleaded their cause. A new process of cultivation was to be undertaken; the Son of God himself becoming their teacher. But this was to be the last; if it should fail, then justice might take its course, and hew down the offensive, useless, and cumbrous object. The parable still lives; a picture of the personal history of every one who enjoys the privileges of the Gospel, but fails to become obedient to God. Viewed in this light, it contains an exhibition of God's expectations concerning us; his disappointment in us; and his consequent treatment of us.

The parable shows us,

#### I. THE REASONABLE EXPECTATION OF OUR CREATOR.

Expectation of fruit stands forth here most prominent. A man *planted*\* a tree. It did not come there

\* The criticism must be regarded as strained, which, from the phrase "had a fig-tree planted," concludes that he did not cause it to be planted.

by accident. He was *interested* in having a tree there. And he had chosen a particular *kind* of tree. It was one adapted by its nature to produce figs. Hence he chose a fig-tree ; because the fig was the fruit he desired. He planted it in a *vineyard*, or enclosed place ; a cultivated field, where the soil was rich, and the trees were protected, and cared for. It was committed also to one skilful in the care of trees. This intention of the owner thus expressed, laid the foundation for a reasonable expectation of that specific fruit which he desired. If you have ever planted a vine, a rose-bush, or an apple-tree, you know the feeling ; and through it, you may know your Maker's feelings.

Man is the tree planted by the hand of God, in his own choice garden, and brought under his own most gracious culture, the light of a supernatural revelation, the example of a perfect goodness, and the influences of supernatural grace.

Our first inquiry here is :

1. *What kind of fruit does our Creator expect of man ?* And we may say in general, it is goodness ; godliness and benevolence put forth in action ; that form of character, that course of life, and the exercise of that influence which at once most honors his Creator, ennobles himself, and blesses his race. Where, then, shall we, as rational beings, look for an expression of our Creator's will in reference to us ? We have our native propensities ; we all love ease, and honor, and wealth, and pleasure in its grosser or more refined forms. If we pursue them, will that accomplish the end of our existence ? or, does he that formed, and planted, and cultivated us, look for something else from us ?

His commands shall reply. They are an unveiling



of his thoughts, an utterance of his will. These commands cover our whole existence, and comprehend the action of all our powers, outward and inward. We were made to be, and to do, whatever the commands of Jehovah specify. They begin their work at the centre of our spiritual being; controlling the first springs of all mental and moral action. We must *love*. That is their beginning, their sum, and substance. That is, we must go out of ourselves, to find the *object* of our complacency; the *source* of our delight; the *end* of our actions. And the *Lord* must be that object, source, and end. We must then descend from him to his creatures, and find an innumerable multitude, of whom, as a race, we form a constituent part, and we must love all for his sake, and in him. This was our duty under mere law. But as sinners under redemption, we must, moreover, repent of sin toward God, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. From this exercise branch out all that loveliness and holiness of character; that constancy of obedience; that practice of virtue; that holy influence over men, which are specified in innumerable precepts of the Divine Word.

In Christ again, we find our highest model. Many others are patterns. But they have all said: "Be ye followers of me, as I follow Christ."

The fruits he bore, were—obedience; "My meat and drink is, to do the will of him that sent me."—Submission; "Not my will, but thine be done."—Zeal; "The zeal of thy house hath consumed me."—Patience and confidence; "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the Son."—Benevolence and meekness; "For our sakes, he gave his back to the smiters."

His external life was, holiness to God and beneficence to men. It was spiritual in its ends, tone and influence ; self-denying, loyal, and prayerful.

Man is then to be like Christ ; and to live like him ; every man. He is to have the same ends, spirit, and influence. You cannot name that moral excellence in Christ, or in any of his best servants, their character or their life, which every human being is not expected by his Creator to possess and exercise. The most wicked men are to repent, and turn to God and his service, as the idolatrous and licentious Corinthians did. The most self-righteous are to become as penitent, and self-abased, and grateful, as Paul. Worldly-minded persons are to become spiritually-minded ; proud men humble ; liars and fraudulent men, truthful and scrupulous in the use of their tongues. “Let him that stole, steal no more.” The impure must cease to “wallow in the mire.” Profane persons must hallow the name of their Creator, and no more blaspheme it. Ambitious men must seek his glory, instead of their own. Covetous men must henceforth lay up their treasures in heaven. Selfish men must despise their own littleness of spirit. Prayerless men must begin to pray ; alone ; with their families, and their friends.

All this God expects of every one. He wishes this world, now a desert, to become a garden of the Lord. He would have mankind become his happy family ; men, his dutiful, happy children.

Fellow-man, what think you of these requirements, as it respects others ; but particularly as it respects yourself ? It is indispensable that you should see that—

2. *These expectations are reasonable and right.*



They are founded upon man's endowments, and upon his relations to his Maker.

When we examine the beings and objects that surround us, we discover that every thing has an ultimate purpose. That gives the universe its meaning; that makes the study of nature so lofty an intellectual pursuit. Man is an end to every thing that surrounds him. He ministers to nothing as his ultimate end. Every thing points to him as its lord; every thing waits on him, either to do his will, or, unbidden, to serve him. What then; is it the glory of every other creature, that it ministers to some creature superior to itself; and has man no end nor design worthy of his own wonderful faculties! If you examine his body, you will discover that every part of it waits on the spirit within its enclosure. Its exquisite mechanism works towards one noble end, an end superior to its own nature. It is matter; but its aim is spiritual good. But what of the spirit of man! That too is wonderfully endowed. And does not that tend upward too, above itself as an end, like all that surrounds it? Yes; unless man is the absolute and universal sovereign. If he belongs to a higher system, then he must be subordinate in it, as all other creatures belong to him, by being subordinate to him. Thus says the voice of reason; and in so saying, echoes the voice of revelation: "Know that Jehovah, he is God; it is he that made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Of him, and through him, and to him are all things."

All man's endowments are God's gifts. He that gave the fig-tree the power of producing its delicious fruit, made man capable of bearing these precious fruits

of righteousness. And he planted him in this fair garden ; and has sent upon him all the needful influences of his providence and grace. And he comes, expecting fruit from him.

And it must be farther observed, that,

3. *This expectation is earnest.* “ Behold, these three years I come, seeking fruit.” Three years successively the owner comes, looking anxiously for the fruit he desires. What is more natural and reasonable than that ! We may all know that peculiar feeling with which one watches a favorite tree or plant ; which is expected to furnish either flowers, shade, or fruit. But how much more earnest is the expectation which a conscientious Teacher feels towards a pupil whom he has faithfully and laboriously instructed ? Pass then beyond that to the expectation of a Parent ! Then pass to the expectation of a Creator, who made us so fearfully and wonderfully ; of a Saviour who died for us so kindly. Allusion is, in fact, here made to the system of mediation. And it gives peculiar force and tenderness to the exhibition of God’s expectancy. So earnest was our gracious Creator to have us become what he desires us to be, that he has given the race a second trial. And although we are born under the new dispensation, yet the moral power of the old is not lost upon us. We feel the full power and pressure both of law and of grace. While nature and conscience urge us to duty, the Bible and the Cross complete the moral power that persuades us to holiness of heart and life.

We are probably not to seek for a doctrinal analogy in all the features of the story. The intercession here expresses a general fact in the history of those who finally reject the offered salvation. It is not the inter-



cession which Christ employs for those who trust him ; but the general exercise of long-suffering in God. Or, it may be regarded as the kind work of the Holy Spirit, as he induces a sinner, while refusing submission to Christ, yet to plead for a delay of doom. It may be, that intercession which he produces in the Church, godly parents, ministers, and others praying for a respite of deserved judgment on the ungodly.

Mere law would at once cut down a barren fig-tree. But grace cries : “ Spare, for I may restore it.” The admission of this intercession shows God’s earnest desire ; the exciting it in the hearts of his people, still more. The expectation is then the more reasonable and earnest, as the possibility of our recovery is so complete, the urgency so intense ; the aid so abundant ; the skill of a divine cultivator now being expended on them ! The divine compassion urges ; divine sympathy awaits our first return ; divine power and faithfulness are the pledge of our welcome and success. Every command reveals God’s feeling, as saying : “ I have bidden this rational creature to love me ; and I come now ; again and again seeking in him a heart to love me.” Every invitation, every threatening, every promise, every temporal blessing, every drop of water, every beam of light, every ordinance of the Gospel, the Bible, the text, the sermon, the prayer, each speaks the same language.

This is the fig-tree planted and cultivated with divine care, for the sake of its precious fruit ; the richest, in God’s estimate, that grows in all his vast domains.

The second stage of the parable is,

## II. THE DISAPPOINTMENT.

God cannot be disappointed as we are ; for he can-

not think, nor love, nor exist as we do. Yet our existence, our thoughts, love and disappointment, all convey to us equally accurate conceptions of him.

Two classes of persons disappoint him.

1. *The vicious.* He looks for good works, and they perform wicked works; for grapes, and they bring forth wild grapes. He looks for holiness, and they are filled with corruption; for love, and finds hatred; for reverence, and finds contempt; for useful employment of their time and their influence, but they spend all in hurting themselves and others. No man nor angel can tell how our Maker feels at the sight of one of his rational creatures doing its utmost to efface his image from its nature, and disappoint all his paternal feelings. But he is equally disappointed in the,

2. *Negatively good.* This class wonder how they can be charged with disappointing their Creator. They are looking superficially in both directions. When they think of the bad things they do not do, they forget to enumerate the good things they equally omit to do. In thinking of their good deeds, they overlook entirely a kind of mischief which they are constantly working. There is a "cumbering the ground" which seems to enter but little into their calculations, although the Master of the garden thinks much of it. The difference between man and the inferior animals embraces his rational free-will. Their wills can never effect a breach of moral law, or defeat the purpose of their Maker; man's can, and does. He can resist all forms of influence on his heart. This class of persons then do not repent of sin; nor yield themselves up to the Spirit of God. Many of them are satisfied with their fine moral sentiments, their religious reverence; their respectful



attention to the Gospel. Like the Jews, they mistake enjoying privileges, for being benefited by them. It is as if the fig-tree should content itself with enjoying sunshine and showers, and the skilful hand of culture ; which is all very valuable. But God expects fruit. They have sunshine ; showers ; leaves ; broad-spreading, beautiful ; but no figs ! Thus they remain, from year to year, impenitent. There is no outward confession of Christ. He expects every soul redeemed by his blood, to honor him by a sincere avowal of its dependence on him, its submission to him, its confidence and its consecration to his service. They exert no religious influence on others. Not doing any positive injury satisfies them, but not their Maker. He expects good works ; but they produce only “dead works ;” dead in the unbelief that originates them. Of each of us a decided and strong religious influence is required. Who can exempt himself ; who would exempt himself from this responsibility ?

The parable has another and final stage :

### III. THE PROCESS OF DESTRUCTION.

“Cut it down,” was the first command. That exhibits to us the tremendous truth, that we deserve to perish for disappointing our Maker’s expectations ; that we deserve it for our first transgressions ; that our deserving grows more intense with every renewed transgression ; that we deserve to perish for negative sins, or not bearing fruit. But you will notice here, that the cutting down the tree does not refer to any of the calamities of this life. With bodies of men, God deals in judgment here. The Lord thus threatens Israel by his servant Isaiah : “Now will I sing a song to my

well-beloved, touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill ; and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein. And he looked that it should bring forth grapes ; and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it ? And now go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard ; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up ; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down : and I will lay it waste ; it shall not be pruned nor digged ; but there shall come up briars and thorns ; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” This parable our Lord repeated to the men of his generation. And it was fearfully verified in their history, within less than forty years.

But the parable now before us is related for the very different purpose of showing that the calamities of this life are not the destruction threatened against individuals. The Galileans who had perished, whether by Pilate’s cruelty or justice ; or, the eighteen on whom the tower fell, were not worse, perhaps not as guilty, as many who were then living, and listening to Christ. It is not now an orchard or a vineyard which our Saviour holds to our view ; but a single, unfruitful tree ; its history, and its destiny.

“Cut it down” is the sentence of death upon the impenitent, viewed in reference to its consequences ; not in itself considered, for death comes equally to all. Look then at,



1. *The terribleness of the sentence.* Death comes to an impenitent person, the end of Divine cultivation. You remember that when that blow is struck, it is after a respite. The first sentence from the owner is dreadful: "Cut it down." But more dreadful than that is the gardener's reply: "if THEN it bear fruit, well; if not, then, AFTER THAT, thou shalt cut it down." Can any thing present a more dreary spectacle, a more desperate case! It is an echo of the sentence: "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." "The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briars, is rejected, and is *nigh unto* cursing, whose end is to be burned." Intercession has ceased; means and influences for good have ceased. And all hope from them has ceased. And the former enjoyment of them only goes to the aggravation of guilt and doom.

It is the end of Divine expectation. God will never look again to that soul to become obedient, holy or useful!

It is the end of Divine disappointment. God will never again be tried and grieved by its failure. It is a tree cut down, and cast out.

To show all this in action, as he here uttered it in words, our Saviour on his way to Jerusalem, seeing a fig-tree in the distance, went to it to get some fruit; and when he had found nothing but leaves, though it was the time to find fruit, if any had been produced, he doomed it, "and presently the fig-tree *withered away*." This was a parabolic action, even more terrible than the

word-parables. Thus the soul of man withers away under the final curse.

I will follow it no farther than to this negative aspect of its destiny. The Scriptures go much farther. This, however, is enough for our present contemplation; a soul created for great ends; cultivated, and cared for; at the end of its trial abandoned as hopeless and useless for ever!

Look from the terribleness, now, to

2. *The righteousness of this sentence*: “*Out it down.*” It is proved to be a useless tree. “If I had wanted a shade-tree, I should have planted an oak for beauty of form and foliage. I might have chosen the palm. But I wanted figs; and therefore I honored this tree with this place and this culture. Failing to produce figs, it fails to answer my purposes, and is useless to me. It has no right in my grounds, and it shall no longer occupy them. This is righteous towards a tree; it is righteous toward man. The tree was more than useless; it was also noxious. It cumbered the ground; occupying the room where another might have stood; drawing the strength of the soil to itself; and keeping the beams of the sun from others. It is right in our Creator to determine how long he can bear with our unprofitableness; and when he had better cease to cultivate a soul that makes no return.

This is, then, our solemn position. We are planted by our Creator in his garden; each of us is a tree, endowed with specific powers adapted to the attainment of certain excellencies, and the achievement of particular forms of good. God is not indifferent to us. He loves



us, and has placed us under mediatorial influences. He expects fruit from us. He encourages each one of us to become a believer in Jesus, a true Christian. And it is but a mock humility that thinks we can do nothing to please God. This parable fully contradicts it. How great then is our responsibility to bear such fruit! We are now enjoying great privileges; and God is most earnest in granting them. We are in his garden, where he comes seeking fruit. His eye is upon us; our hearts, our lives; on each of us. "Lo, I have come, seeking fruit on *this* tree." It is a kind, but also a solemn inspection. It has reference to *duty*; and to *destiny*.

The inquiry of chief interest with each one, then, is:

*How do I meet this inspecting eye?* There are the fruit-bearing. They live by faith; and so overcome the world, and overcome themselves. They bear in their hearts the fruits of the Spirit. Nothing our Creator regards with more delight. They glorify him before angels by reverence, love, confidence, penitence, and gratitude. They glorify him before men, in their families, showing the Spirit of Christ; honoring his word, his ordinances, his providence, his Sabbaths. In business they show that they fear God; love their Saviour; and are looking for the salvation of God as their supreme portion. In the Church they are found laboring for God's glory, and man's salvation. Some are fruitless. Friend, look at yourself as Christ now looks upon you. Look into his eye as it rests on you, and read what is passing in his heart. How many years have you occupied a place in his garden? What were you sent into this world for? How long has the Lord been cultivating you? But there are no returns. The first sentence has gone forth against you,—do you know that?

“Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” But that sentence has been arrested by the intercessor. And under that prayer you now live. Look at the terms of it; for they are of supreme interest to you. “Let it alone this year also.” Spare it, Lord, one more season. The disobedient are then merely suffered to live. It is not from any desert. They deserve to be cut down. And are you careless and secure under such circumstances; can nothing arouse you to see your state? Remember the difference between a reversed and a suspended sentence. Yours is but suspended. “Cut it down” hangs over you; suspended for “a year;” a season of experiments with you. Those experiments of mercy are now going on. Your Sabbaths, your Bible; Nature’s teachings; the Holy Spirit; sermons; afflictions; all look to this end. What an importance attaches to them, as they are used by the Lord! His design in them gives them their significance and worth. And how does this benevolent intercessor regard you, all the while? With expectation. He has been coming again and again, looking for fruit. “These three years.” That is long in the life of a fig-tree. With you it may have been ten times three. In childhood God expected the piety of a child. In youth, he came; in manhood; in sickness; in revivals; but it has all been disappointment, up to this very hour. That is all you have done; cumbered the ground, wasted the culture of Heaven, and disappointed its expectations. This sermon will cause another disappointment! Hear then the remainder of the prayer, under which you are kept from destruction. “Perhaps it will bear fruit; if not, then, *after that*, thou shalt cut it down.” “After that;” after what? which year, which sermon, which resistance of the Spirit? He



only knows. This parable is among the warnings he kindly sends. It is all a warning ; a warning, from beginning to end ; Christ's warning. A heathen said : "The feet of the avenging deities are shod with wool." You can't say so. "The axe is laid at the root." There it is ; you can see it, the very axe that will cut you down, if you do not bring forth fruit. Every change in your life is whetting its edge. Hark ! Did you hear that blow ? It was the axe falling on some barren fig-tree. What a sound ; it echoes to the caverns of hell ! Again it strikes. There is a tree, tall and fair, as the cedars of Lebanon. But it has only leaves. Tremble, sinner, as you hear it fall. Its season of respite is over. Divine patience can spare it no longer. It falls ; falls for eternity ! Oh ! what if you *should* die as you are ! Your existence a failure ; a failure to answer God's merciful designs and glorious purposes ! You die, a useless being. There is no place of honor or usefulness that you ever can occupy. He that is unfaithful in the sacred trusts of time, shall have no trusts in eternity. Your history will be that of the barren fig-tree ; which neither God nor you will remember with any satisfaction !

Be not deceived ; God is not mocked. He utters no idle words. The axe lies in sight. Death will lift it soon. Depend upon it, you will never be planted again, if he cuts you down by the Master's order, as a cumberer of the ground. You are indulging a secret hope that these warnings may prove to be unfounded. Then you would prove Christ to be a deceiver. You indulge a secret hope that you will find sympathy somewhere in that dreadful day. No ; when he withdraws his sympathy, the universe becomes to you a

cheerless prison. Does it seem too dreadful to be true? I will tell you something more dreadful, that you know to be true. It is, that *you have not done what God wants you to do*. It is, that *you will indulge a hope that makes God a liar*. It is, that *you will go on, in the face of this parable, to destruction*. It is, that you will resist such kindness, refuse to yield to such ennobling influences, persevere in thwarting the most friendly designs of God toward you. It is, that since there must be a last warning despised, a last sermon, a last strain on the cord that keeps you back from destruction, and you know not but that awful closing act of resistance is now to be performed, yet you dare to perform it!

Hear the word: "Cut it down; cut it down." What; a tree? No; a soul!

I once occupied a room, looking out on a garden beautifully arranged. When the winter had passed, I watched with intense sympathy the effect of returning spring on the trees and plants. One tree remained brown and leafless, while all around it were putting on their beautiful robes. One day the gardener came to this tree, and looked at it with an expression of sympathy. He seemed to wish to help it put forth foliage. His visits were repeated several times; new care was bestowed upon it; frequent tests were applied to ascertain whether it still lived. Days passed; and it was only becoming more hideous, as its companions grew more beautiful. My own sympathy for it sensibly declined with my hope for its recovery; it was becoming so manifest that "it cumbered the ground." At length I observed the gardener come and give it one more earnest inspection. He shook his head, as if hope had



died in his heart, and his lips pronounced its doom. Soon he returned with his axe. Every blow upon it excited my sympathy, but satisfied my judgment. And when he cut it down, dragged it out, and cast it on the fire, I said, it is right ; but it is awfully symbolical of the doom of Christless men.

## LECTURE XXXII.

THE TEN VIRGINS; OR, PREPARATION IN TIME FOR ETERNITY.\*

MATT. XXV. 1-13.—“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so*; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.”

THE point of this beautiful, yet awful parable, lies in the two expressions: “Took their lamps, and took no oil with them;” “And the door was shut.” There are incidental analogies in many specific features of the parable; but only one can be fully carried out. There

\* This subject, and the handling of it, so closely resemble those of the 30th Lecture, that one of them would have been omitted from the course, but for an aversion to leave out either of these parables.



is an incidental allusion to Christ's relation to the Church, which is constantly compared to marriage. There is an incidental allusion to the comparison of the Holy Spirit to oil. But this is not prominent in the parable.

Among oriental nations, and even the Greeks and Romans, the custom prevailed, of having the bridegroom at a late hour of the night, conduct the bride from her father's dwelling, where the marriage ceremony had been performed, to his own house. To add to the brilliancy and joyfulness of the scene, he invited his young female friends and relations to grace this procession. Adorned in robes suitable to the occasion, they took lamps or torches, and waited together at a neighboring house. When the signal was given, announcing the approach of the bridegroom, they issued forth to congratulate and welcome the happy pair. They then fell into the train, singing; and thus advanced to the bridegroom's house, where, if he were rich, a magnificent entertainment awaited them.\* Homer and Euripides describe similar scenes. And modern missionaries report them as still witnessed in India.† Mr. Ward, in fact, saw two striking exemplifications of this parable. The bridegroom came from a distance, and the bride lived at Serampore, to which place the bridegroom was to come by water. After waiting two or three hours, at length, near midnight, it was announced, as if in the very words of Sacred Scripture, "Behold! the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." All the persons employed now lighted their lamps, and ran with them in their hands, to fill up their stations in the

\* Crit. Bib., 1. 150.

† Dr. Ward's India.

procession. Some of them had lost their lights ; and it was too late to seek them. The cavalcade moved forward toward the house of the bride. The company then entered into a large and splendidly illuminated area. The bridegroom was carried in the arms of his friends, and placed in a superb seat in the midst of the company. In a few moments he went into the house, the door of which was immediately shut, and guarded by Sepoys. I and others expostulated with the door-keepers, but in vain. Never was I so struck with our Lord's beautiful parable, as at this moment, when the door was shut.\*

The lamps were probably such torches as are still carried in one hand in processions in the East, and fed by oil held in cans carried in the other hand.

Our Saviour then illustrates an aspect of his kingdom, by this Eastern usage. A company of ten young women awaits the coming of the bridegroom. They are alike in dress, in having torches and cans. They all alike expect with interest the approach of the joyous retinue. They wait, until weariness lulls them to sleep. They are awakened by a cry which gives them barely time to seize their flambeaus, trim them, supply them with oil, and join the procession. But at this critical moment some of their number discover that they had made one fatal oversight. Too carelessly contenting themselves with seeming to be ready, they found that in fact they were not ready. They then looked in vain to their more prudent companions, who could not extricate them from these embarrassing circumstances. And while they went away to make up their deficiency

\* View of Hindoos. v. 2. p. 29.



by purchasing oil, the procession passed by, and passed on; entered the house; and the door was shut. At length they came, both as invited guests, and as having oil in their vessels. But the door was *shut*, and no man could open it but by the permission of one; and he would not give it; but simply replied to their earnest entreaty to be admitted: "I never knew you." This was equivalent to saying, If you had been my friends, and had sufficiently regarded my interests, you would not have suffered the procession to go on, half illuminated.

These were then too late; too late in getting their oil. When it was wanted, they had none. When they had it, none was wanted. They came too late to avail themselves of their invitation. When they came, the door was shut. And none could enter the house, who were not in the procession.

This solemn parable has no reference to persecutors and despisers of religion, but to serious, yea, to very serious people. They are so much like the persons who will enter heaven, that neither they nor others perceive any difference. And the danger which it is designed to point out, is this: the careless decision of the great question, Am I a Christian? The sleeping of these virgins is not reproved. It does not refer to the backsliding of Christians, but to the tranquillity of men produced by embracing the hope of heaven. Some get that hope on solid grounds, and feel the tranquillizing effects of it. Others are equally soothed into calm expectation of heaven, without a sufficient ground for such hope.

I first inquire, then,

## I. WHAT IS AN UNFOUNDED EXPECTATION OF HEAVEN?

The vital cause of religion in the human heart is the living Spirit of God. He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. But as that never can be determined by consciousness in any case, we must make descriptions of true piety by which every one may test himself. We look, then, for the distinctive features of a hope which is unfounded, and yet sufficiently like a well-founded hope, to deceive a serious, well-meaning person. We inquire after the hope of a person who, like the foolish virgins, appears to himself and others, to be both waiting for the bridegroom, and prepared for his coming. The evil lies in his heart, where no human eye but his own can see it; and where he will not search earnestly enough to discover it.

One radical defect is,

1. *In his views of sin.* What are right views of sin? If you ask the Deist, he will say: It is the want of honesty, patriotism, honor, and manliness. If you ask the man who has never thought far enough to form any definite views on religion, he may say: It is murder, robbery, and any other gross offences against the order and peace of society. But we ask, what does God's Word say of sin? Whatever that is, we must entertain the same view, or our hope will deceive us.

The regenerated person whom the Bible describes, has discovered that in sin which the world does not see, nor the most serious who remain satisfied with any thing short of a radical change. He has discovered its radical principle to be selfishness. Some persons are shocked at their own immoralities; some are grieved at their own want of religious sensibility and earnestness. But the man who will meet Christ in peace has



gone abundantly beyond that. He sees on one side the law of God as exemplified in the life of Christ. All is perfect, pure, supremely desirable. It is the beauty of holiness. Whoever obeys that law meets every claim upon him, esteems and treats every being just as he should, for he loves perfectly. But he who disobeys that law sets himself above man and God; his feelings and his interests above those of the universe; he has broken from the great social system, and, in fact, becomes its enemy. A very moral and kind man of the world cannot see that. He is conscious of so much kind feeling and regard to the public welfare, that he does not see how the degree of selfishness he possesses can have so terrible a nature and tendency. Here then is a turning-point of character and destiny. Repentance is the first condition of salvation. But repentance is not a dislike of one form of sin and hatred of another. It is an intense opposition to every form of it, and especially to that vital principle of all its forms, which consists in supreme complacency in our own persons, and the supreme regard to our imagined separate interests. If one makes a mistake there, he can very easily go along far in an appearance of piety and a hope of heaven, without having really taken the first step toward heaven. We are not under the law as a system of mere requirement, mere justice, and unsympathizing rigor. The penalty of the law has been remitted; the exactions of law have been suspended. But the whole object of that is to get us to do what the law prescribes. Nothing is altered but the mode of bringing us to obey the law. But, obey it we must; and the first step toward obedience is,—to discover the wrong of disobedience by

seeing the excellence of its requirement. The regenerated man hates all forms of selfishness ; indifference to God or man ; hatred to either ; opposition to the interests of either, or to the will of God.

This leads me to notice that true piety involves self-hatred. "I abhor myself," is a language which almost all superficially converted persons shun. It is the language of Job, of Isaiah, of David, of Daniel, of Paul, and of godly men in every age. They are not worse than other men ; but they see the evil of their characters, as unregenerate men never see it. Some of them have deep convictions of sinfulness, and some of them get a religious hope ; but they do not permanently abhor the evil which is in themselves. They get to be self-complacent and careless. The true penitent sees that sin once pervaded his being ; and that now, though it is conquered, and the radical principle of his character is changed, yet he has much sin dwelling in him. In fact it negatively affects every thing. He does nothing as it should be done. Nothing that he does is the ground of his confidence, his hope, or his appeal to God. Every thing has, in one aspect, to be forgiven.

True piety sees still farther, the true desert of sin ; because it believes God, that the wages of sin is death, eternal death. Pride and unbelief secretly or openly disputes with God whether he ought to punish sin so terribly. Hence it neither receives God's testimony concerning his own judicial character ; concerning his indignation against sin ; concerning the desert of sin ; concerning the terrible danger of sinning ; and concerning the immense price of redemption, or the greatness of the sacrifice required to atone for it. There is then one other radical difference between the super-



ficial religionist and the sincere Christian in regard to sin ; that is, its terrible power. Some men think it is the result of circumstances or example ; or, if in the will, a few deep reflections will turn the will at any time. The true Christian has discovered that man must be regenerated, as John describes it in the opening chapter of his gospel : “ As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God ; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” In other words, as the enormous guilt of sin throws us on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, so the power of sin throws us on the renewing and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Directly implied in this is another radical defect of the superficial religionist, in

2. *His views of Christ* ; Christ in his person, and Christ in his relations to man. I will present this difference in some contrasted cases. Judas was with Christ during his public ministry. He saw in him an innocent man, a divine teacher ; but he never gave up the world, from love to Christ ; he never consecrated himself to the service of Christ. He professed to be a Christian and a minister of Christ, but he had never committed his immortal interests to his care. But Peter loved him with all his heart ; suffered for him, toiled for him, and died for him, as we are informed. Then take Saul of Tarsus, and Paul the apostle. Saul had learned what Christ did and taught. But he was then a proud, self-righteous moralist. He cared nothing for Christ, his kingdom or his people. When he became a true Christian, he renounced his righteousness, his friends, his worldly prospects, his will for Christ. He glorified him as God, as the only Redeemer. He

loved him more than his life, fearlessly proclaimed his glory, his claims on every heart, his coming to save his friends and destroy his enemies. Every motive of action he drew from his Saviour. Christ was with him, as he expressed it, all in all.

And this involves another point of contrast :

3. *The superficial Christian fails in his views of duty.* He may have, in one sense, a high standard of duty ; and yet he utterly fails of acting by the true standard. He fails in aim and in action.

His aims are two : to get a comfortable hope for himself, and to convince others he is pious. Here is a double defect in his aims. It is not piety he wants, but so much of the appearance of it as to satisfy himself and others. In times of general apathy, such persons are very little concerned about themselves ; for others do not require the appearance of much piety, and their own consciences have sunk down to the common level. And therefore, having as much piety as suits their purposes, they are contented. There is oil in the lamp, no matter about the vessel. The torch burns now ; no matter about the future. They have enough to introduce them to the company of the other attendants on the bridegroom ; they do not trouble themselves to inquire whether they have enough to join the procession. And while their aim is thus defective, in not seeking grace as well as the appearance of it ; not wanting humility and deadness to the world, faith, hope, love and zeal ; a strong, living faith, but a satisfactory and respectable appearance of piety ; they also fail, in seeking themselves exclusively. Neither Christ, his kingdom, nor the everlasting welfare of men engage their affections and zeal. Their whole religious life therefore is but a



repetition of their former selfishness, under a religious form.

Then, of course, there must be a corresponding defect in their actions. The most spiritual parts of religion they are the least conversant with—praise, for instance, and thanksgiving,—as a personal act, alone with God, they have but little to do with. They have not the heart for it; and then it can be omitted without much troubling the conscience. The earnest study of the Scriptures, with deep reflection; drinking from the fountain of living waters; listening affectionately to the voice of their Shepherd; reverently to the voice of their God; this they fail in. So too in prayer. Prayer as a form they may keep up formally; but communion with the Father of their spirits they have not. They shuffle off something they call prayer. But entering deliberately and seriously into each branch of prayer; adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication for themselves, or intercession for others; to all that they are strangers. The same might be said of self-denying action for Christ or men; they know nothing of that. Hence their religion has neither root nor fruit. It is like a tree cut down in the forest, and placed among other trees in the garden to stand for a day like a living tree. But there is neither life nor fruit there.

The parable leads us now to see,

## II. WHAT MUST BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS FORM OF CHARACTER, AND THIS COURSE OF ACTION.

To show that, was our Lord's intention in the parable. He knew how the heart is prone to grasp at the shadow even of salvation, and miss the substance.

And he accordingly shows us five wise, prudent young women, entering with reflection upon a preparation for their honorable and joyful position and part in the marriage festivities of their friend. They made a judicious calculation of all that constituted an adequate preparation. They were to be dressed suitably; to provide torches; to have them supplied with wick and oil; to have them lighted, so that they could fly immediately to their posts as the summons was given. And then they must especially see to it that a surplus quantity of oil be provided, as there might be much delay, and the oil first applied to the torches be consumed. Thus attired and equipped, they could yield themselves up to slumber, for they could fly, on a minute's warning, to their stations. They were aroused by the welcome signal, joined the procession, and shared the festivities of the occasion. The others were foolish, wanting in practical wisdom; which they manifested by neglecting the most essential part of the preparation. And the consequences were these: the loss of all the pains they had taken; the disappointment of all their hopes; the realizing of more than their worst fears. These are the results of a superficial piety, and a selfish hope of heaven.

1. *The loss of all their pains.* Even superficial religion requires some painstaking; and verily it has its reward in respect to keeping up appearances and appeasing the conscience. But just so far as it had any more serious and lasting end in view, it loses every thing. They want pardon of sin. It is not to be had in the way they worked, if they had worked with ten times as much diligence as they exercised. No amount of good works ever procured the pardon of one



sin, while the simple cry of the publican in a prayer of seven words; was successful for the blotting out of innumerable transgressions. These foolish women took a great deal of pains; but for one lack, it all failed of securing what they wanted. So far as this class of persons have any reference to the approbation of God, they utterly lose all they have wrought. So far as eternal life is in their intention, they fail of it. The great, the radical change is what they never intended to pass through. But Jesus has said: "Except a man be born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." There is also,

2. *A disappointment of all their hopes.* What expectations these young women had formed! They had seen wedding processions, and had heard others describe them with enthusiasm. But they were destined to know nothing of all that enjoyment by experience. What a moment of consternation was the moment of awaking! Our lamps are gone, or it may be rendered, going out. They had been invited to join the procession, had accepted the invitation, had dressed for it, and gone to the place of rendezvous, full of hope. But they awaked to see their light going out in smoke and darkness, their cans empty, their office of torch-bearers taken from them, and themselves left in darkness! Then for the first time they awaked to think what was necessary. Their lamps were expiring just when needed; after they had been long burning; and when they could not be rekindled. Oh! that we had taken oil in our vessels. That was the one unavailing regret then uppermost in their hearts. But the thought and the wish came too late. Then they awaked to exertion, but too late also. They called on those to help who

could not help; they ran to the shops; but it was all too late. The same exertion put forth once would have saved all this. Oh what a picture of the disappointed hopes which await those who will not go now to the root of this great matter! Their lamps are to go out in the damps of death. Then they will discover the infinite value of true faith in Christ; of a thorough heart-religion. But all is disappointment. Nothing is as they hoped it would be. They are unprepared to go into the marriage supper of the King; and it is too late to get ready. They had hoped to find God lenient, and he is stern; to find conscience peaceful, and it is just awakening to upbraid their folly. They had imagined that they could take the same world-pleasing standard through. But now comes in its place a very different thing—a God-pleasing standard. Then one more shade is added:

3. *They realize more than the worst of their fears.* The door was shut. If they had any fears they probably only attained to this point: we shall perhaps have to borrow some oil if ours should fail; or, the procession may stop for us; or, certainly we shall, at the worst, be late. But our kind friend will never subject us to the mortification and disappointment of a refusal to let us enter. Yet he did. Jesus says the door was shut. They came and knocked, and sent to the bridegroom their names. But he had given them up. All the guests that were to be admitted were already in their places. He would have been happy to have seen them in the procession; and then they would have been welcomed there. But now they had arranged the festival as if they did not exist. They were out in external darkness. But it did not dim one ray of the



light within, nor check the flow of social joy. Thus are many, who hoped to enter heaven, to find at last that the door is shut. They had feared often, perhaps, that such piety as theirs might need to become a little more serious and earnest at least. But that it would cost them any serious embarrassment about entering heaven they never dreamed. What then must be their condition when they find two facts: they are shut out; and the Lord declares, in answer to their agonizing cry for admittance, he never knew them!

That is the prospect our Lord intended to place before us.

This subject then, thus presented by him, should have important practical results in all who do not despise his warnings. It contains a principle of very grave import in its relations even to the higher interests of the present life. It utters this weighty maxim,—BE READY. The anxiety of most young men is to get into positions of profit and honor. But, with many who succeed in this respect, the result is exactly portrayed in the parable. They join the marriage procession, but cannot continue in it, because they are not prepared. If the time spent in amusement, in wishing for elevation, in looking to others to advance them, had been employed in making themselves ready for the station, how different would have been the result! Get ready for the station of honor, and it will be ready for you. But the parable looks beyond the present fleeting life,—

*It should lead us to a thorough self-examination in regard to our prospects in eternity.* The judgment of our friends or our enemies cannot be relied on here. Our own opinion is of no value if formed under the delusive

influence of self-love, and the determination not to make any serious change in our hearts or lives. We must come, each one of us, to an impartial examination of ourselves, as if God had laid on us the charge of examining another person, to determine whether they should be encouraged in their hope of heaven. The moment when these foolish virgins went to sleep, represents a critical moment in every person's life who entertains an unfounded expectation of heaven. It is the period when, after more or less serious reflection, perhaps after restoration from sickness, or the death of a friend, or in a revival of religion, it matters not as to the circumstances, the whole destiny of eternity was seriously contemplated. Some solemn purposes were formed; enough, in a word, was done to produce composure of spirit and hope. There was a semblance of preparation, which satisfied the conscience. Some persons reach that point by the sweeping belief that every body is ready for heaven, and will go in. That is very soothing to them who can believe it. It must almost surely put them in the class of the five foolish virgins. Some are ready, because they are better than some professors of religion. Some are ready, because they mean to get oil before the bridegroom comes; some, because they once were greatly changed; some, because they are in the company of those who are prepared, dress like them, have torches and lamps like theirs. They attend the same ordinances, use the same pious phrases, and the same prayers. But none of these is a sufficient evidence of preparation. To be prepared for life, death, judgment and eternity, we must be what the Word of God describes a Christian to be. Instead of being separate from God as the world is, we must have the



Spirit of God dwelling in us. Ye are the temple of God. "What," Paul exclaims, "know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost!" And if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Until we know that the Spirit of God has become the controlling power in our hearts, we hope carelessly. But the scrutiny to determine this must be directed to our daily conduct. In business, in company, in reading, alone, are we acting and speaking like persons born of God, and going to a holy residence, where the enjoyment is derived from nothing worldly, but from that to which our most spiritual exercises here most correspond? If self is giving place to Christ in our hearts, and earth to heaven, we are ready to meet the bridegroom. If not, we shall find our lamps expiring in that solemn hour, and the door shut against us.

THE END.























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